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COURT ROYAL

VOL. III.

COURT ROYAL

A STORY OF CROSS CURRENTS

BY THE

AUTHOR OF 'MEHALAH' 'JOHN HERRING' &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

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THE THIRD VOLUME.

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COURT ROYAL.

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CHAPTER XL.

CHEEK SENIOR.

CHARLES CHEEK was on his way to town next day in an express second-class smoking carriage of the Great Western Railway. He would have gone first, but his funds would not allow the extravagance. At the Kingsbridge Road Station the door of the carriage was opened, and an elderly gentleman dashed in, drawing after him his portmanteau, then signalling through the window, when the train was in motion, that he had forgotten his bundle of rugs and umbrella on the platform. A porter picked them up, ran after the train, and thrust them through the window, knocking the

cigar out of Charles Cheek's mouth and inflicting a dent on his hat.

'Very sorry, upon my word,' said the owner of the articles. 'When travelling one is liable to lose one's goods.'

'Seeing that you have but your head, portmanteau, and bundle of rugs, the exertion of recollecting them cannot be excessive.'

'I never travel if I can help it,' said the other. 'I had just time to throw a shilling to the porter, but as I was agitated I don't know where it went and whether he saw it. Perhaps it fell under the rails and is flattened. When I am hot and flurried my sight fails me and my hand shakes. It does not matter. I will give the man another shilling on my return. Lord bless me! I have got into a smoking carriage. Never mind, I do smoke—for once in my life I am lucky. May this be an omen that my journey will be prosperous! Sometimes I have got into a first class when I had a second class ticket, and then had to pay the difference. Sometimes I have tumbled into a third class when I had paid fare by second, but the company never refunded. Why, bless my heart! Surely I know your face; you are the image of your sainted mother, and have

the Worthivale look about your eyes and mouth—more than has my cross boy Beavis. Surely I am speaking to Mr. Charles Cheek?'

'That is my name, sir, and have I the honour——'

'Of meeting a relative. Your mother was my first cousin. I hear you have been at Plymouth. It is really too bad that you have never been near us. Only a pleasant cruise to Kingsbridge from Plymouth.'

'You have not invited me, sir. Are you Mr. Worthivale?'

'The same. Steward to his Grace the Duke of Kingsbridge. We have a nice little place, Court Royal Lodge, and would have been proud to see you in it. I did not invite you? Bless my soul! how careless of me! I have intended to do so, and tied knots in my pocket-handkerchief several times to remind me to write; but when I came to find the knot I always recollected some omissions in my duty to his Grace, and thought the knot was tied in reference to that. You must excuse my neglect. I am so overwhelmed with business that I have no time to think of private affairs. You may be sure that you would always be welcome at the Lodge.'

'I dare say you have much to occupy you now,' said Charles Cheek. 'There is much talk in Plymouth about the break-up in the Duke's affairs. I hear they are in a very ugly mess.'

'Mess?' exclaimed Mr. Worthivale bridling; 'mess is not a word that is seemly in such connection. A duke's affairs may become embroiled, an earl's involved, an ordinary squire's may fall into confusion, but only a tradesman's can get into a mess. There has been agricultural depression felt in the Midlands, and in the east of England, where much corn is grown, and some of the great landowners have had to retrench, and the smaller have been reduced to difficulties; but here it not so. A duke is something very different from a country squire.'

Not a trace of a blush appeared on the steward's face as he told this lie. He was a man of scrupulous integrity, but to save the honour of the house he served he was ready to say anything—who can tell?—even do anything. Mr. Worthivale, who told this falsehood, was actually on his way to town to see the father of Charles Cheek, the wealthy tradesman, and to try to inveigle him into lending

money to relieve the distress of the family. He had written to Crudge, as agent for Mr. Emmanuel, requesting him to call at his house on a certain day. He had written to the other mortgagees, who were anxious and troublesome, to pacify them with words, if possible. And the words he had used to them were not strictly true. He was not satisfied that Emmanuel, and Emmanuel alone, would be satisfied with only promises. He had tortured his brains for many nights with schemes for raising money without a sale of property. All at once a brilliant idea flashed into his mind. He recollected Mr. Cheek, of the monokeratic system, who had married his pretty and sweet cousin, a Worthivale. He had not met Cheek since the funeral of Mrs. Cheek, but he knew about him and his son from the correspondence of relatives. He had not taken a liking to Mr. Cheek, who was a man of modern ideas, without patience with Conservatives and Churchmen, and held advanced ideas about the land laws and the extension of the franchise, and cried out for Disestablishment, and the abolition of the House of Lords. Mr. Worthivale had heard also of young Charles, a careless, extravagant dog, who gave his father much trouble.

Mr. Cheek had wished his son to enter the business, and had forced him, when he left school, to occupy a stool in the office, but Charles in an hour threw the accounts into such confusion, that it took his father days to unravel them; and although he was tried in various departments of the establishment, he proved such a failure in all, that his father was fain to let him go his own way. Charles had desired to enter the army, but Mr. Cheek would not hear of this, and battled against his son's inclination till the young man was past the age at which he could obtain a commission. Then only did he admit to himself that he had made a mistake. In the army Charles would have had a profession and something to occupy him, and he seemed fit for no other profession, and to care for no other occupation. The father proposed that he should read for the Bar, but the disinclination of Charles for legal studies soon manifested itself. For medicine he was too thoughtless, and Mr. Cheek was forced to let him live as an idler. The father had been so accustomed to work, and to associate work with the first duty of man, even though that work was to throw dust in the eyes of the public, that it was with the utmost reluct-

ance that he consented to find Charles an income of four hundred a year, and to let him live as he liked, associating with officers, losing money to them, entertaining them, and being laughed at by them behind his back. Charles had got into trouble several times, and his father had paid his debts, each time with angry reproaches and threats of disinheritance.

Worthivale had heard that the elder Cheek had amassed a large fortune, which his son's extravagance might impair but could not exhaust. He had taken it into his head that nothing would be easier for him than to persuade old Mr. Cheek to lend the necessary thousands for the saving of the Duke. This was the new web of fancy spun by his hopes, attached to no probabilities, floating in his brain like the gossamer of autumn; and in this vain hope he was on his way to town.

'I am going to drop in on your father,' said Mr. Worthivale. 'I cannot think of going to town without looking him up. It is many years since we met, and when we get old we cling to old acquaintances. Are you going directly home? If so, tell him I shall turn up.'

'Oh no! I shall put up at an hotel. I am

not so keen after the shelter of the paternal wing.'

'I rather want to see your father this evening. I have so much business to occupy my day that I can ill spare other time. Am I likely to find him at home of an evening?'

'Sure to catch him. He never goes to the theatre or concerts. You could not wring five words out of him during business hours. I shall not drop in on him to-morrow till after the Monokeros has drawn in his horn.'

'If that be so,' said the steward, 'I will take a cab after I have had my dinner and go to him. It is as well that we should not be there together; he and I will like to have a chat over old times—times before you were born.'

Accordingly, on reaching town, Mr. Worthivale drove to his inn, ordered a simple dinner, and when he had done, took a hansom to his destination.

Mr. Cheek had just dined, and was lingering over his glass of wine when the steward was announced. He told the servant to show Mr. Worthivale in to him in the dining-room. This was a large apartment with a red flock paper on the walls, and a Turkey carpet on the

floor. The furniture was of heavy mahogany, polished, his chairs covered with red leather. The window curtains were of red rep. Against the walls hung some large engravings—Landseer's dog looking out of a kennel, the Newfoundlander lying on a quay, 'Bolton Abbey in the Olden Time'—pictures every one has seen and knows as he knows the airs of 'Trovatore' and the taste of peppermint.

Over the fireplace was a looking-glass; on the table were oranges, almonds, raisins, and mixed buscuits. Everything was in the room that was to be expected; nothing there that was unexpected. Tottenham Court Road had furnished it. A man's room reflects his mind. Everything there was solid, sound, and commonplace.

Mr. Worthivale had no time to look round him. He ran forward and effusively shook hands with Mr. Cheek, who rose ceremoniously, and received his greeting without great cordiality, but with civility.

'Take a chair, Worthivale; glad to see you. Have port or sherry? If you prefer claret I will have some decanted. Don't drink it myself. Take an orange or—raisins. I will ring and have some more almonds brought in. I

have eaten most. Take some biscuits; you will find a ratafia here and there under the others. I have eaten those on the top. I hope you are well. I have not seen you for twelve years and a half.'

'So much as that? You do not say so!'

'You have not visited me since my wife's death.'

'I may retort on you. I live in the country. You Londoners need a holiday. Why have you not fled the fogs and smoke, and come to me for sea air and the landscape of South Devon?'

'I never take a holiday. Can't afford it. Work always goes on, and always needs my presence. When the Londoners leave town, the country folk come up, and purchase for the ensuing year.'

Mr. Cheek was a heavily built man, with a long head and face, the latter flat, with a nose sticking out of it, much as the Peak of Teneriffe pokes out of the sea—led up to by no subsidiary elevations, abrupt, an afterthought. His eyebrows were black, but his hair was grey, and disposed to retreat from the temples, which were highly polished. He wore a grey thick Newgate collar, a black frock coat, black

trousers, black waistcoat relieved by a heavy gold chain, a good deal of white shirt front, turned-down collars, necessitated by the Newgate fringe, and a black tie. He always smelt of black dye, for his cloth clothes were always new and glossy and uncreased. He had a trick of stretching his arms with a jerk forward at intervals, exposing much cuff, acquired from wearing new coats that were not easy under the arm. His eyes were dark and penetrating, his lips firm. From his nostrils two very dark creases descended to the corners of his mouth, like gashes in which lay black blood. The old man seemed very lonely in his dining-room, without a companion with whom to exchange ideas, and only a choice between almonds and raisins, ratafias and macaroons, but he did not seem to feel it ; as he ate and drank he schemed fresh plans for making money, and that was his delight. A companion would have discussed less profitable and interesting topics.

Worthivale spent an hour with old Cheek, telling him about himself, his position at Court Royal, the splendour of the Kingsbridge family, the virtues of the Duke, and Lord Ronald and the Marquess, and the unapproachable charms of Lady Grace.

The steward went on to talk about the estates, the prospect of making a second Torquay out of Bigbury Bay, of the chance of converting the creek of Kingsbridge into an harbour, of the building stone on the estates, of the shale from which petroleum might be extracted, of the slate quarries that only needed opening out and connecting with the sea by a line to supply and roof in the whole south coast of England.

Mr. Cheek had listened with indifference to the enumeration of the merits of the members of the noble House, but when the steward touched on speculative ventures his interest was excited. He ate all the almonds off the raisin dish as fast as he could chew them, and then rang to have the dish replenished.

Mr. Worthivale hinted that his Grace was in need of temporary accommodation, owing to the extravagance of his ancestors and the calling up of some of the mortgages, and he suggested that a better and safer investment for floating capital could not be found.

Mr. Cheek listened with close attention, but said nothing. Such investments apparently possessed no attraction for him. The steward, with all his eloquence, had made no way.

Nevertheless, Worthivale did not abandon hope. The wealthy tradesman had not disputed the feasibility of his schemes, had not said, in so many words, that he would have nothing to do with the mortgages.

Then the conversation drifted to young Charles. Mr. Worthivale said that he had come to town with him.

'I know what he wants—money,' said the father, with imperturbable countenance. 'Never made a penny himself.'

'I am afraid he gives you a good deal of trouble,' said the steward.

'Fine fellow,' answered old Cheek. 'Good looks. Ready address. A figure. No Devonshire twang. Can't get the R's and the U's right myself. Never shall. Grass is long grass with me, never cropped grass.'

'Charles is a very pleasant-looking fellow,' said Mr. Worthivale, 'the image of his dear mother.'

'Mentally, morally, physically,' acquiesced the trader; 'can't expect every man to take to business.'

'No,' said Mr. Worthivale; 'it is born in some, not in others, like an ear for music, a taste for sport, and a hand for carving a goose.'

'Suppose so,' said Mr. Cheek.

'It takes two generations to make a gentleman,' reasoned Mr. Worthivale, 'and even then —there always remains lurking in the system a *je-ne-sais-quoi*.'

'A what?' exclaimed Mr. Cheek, looking frightened. 'Is it in the skin?'

'Only a French expression,' exclaimed the steward.

'Never understood other than one foreign word, and that—monokeratic, for which I paid five guineas,' said Mr. Cheek. 'I wanted a suitable word. I went to an Oxford scholar, and said, find me the word, and I'll find you a five-pound note and five shillings. That's how I came by it.'

Neither spoke. The steward was peeling an orange. Presently Mr. Cheek began to move uneasily in his chair, to swell and puff. Then out came a confidence. 'Charles is a trouble to me. I fill the barrel, and when I'm gone he'll turn the tap and let it run. No fortune can stand a running tap. I wish I knew how to cure him. This consciousness takes the taste out of my profits. It is like eating bread from which the salt is omitted in the making.'

'Take my advice,' said Worthivale; 'mix him in good society. He hangs about a garrison town for the sake of the officers, but he never associates with the better class of officers, only with those who like his dinners, and bleed him at billiards. He never sees the ladies, and it is ladies who humanise, civilise, and refine.'

'Can't do it. I'm not in society myself. Shop stands in the way.'

'I wish I could persuade him to come to Court Royal Lodge, and pay me a long visit. I could introduce him to people of the first quality, and show him something better than gambling officers and fast ladies. You will never do anything with him, Cheek, till you have put him in a situation where his better qualities may be drawn out, and he may learn to blush at his weaknesses.'

'If he were up here in town,' said the father, scratching his nose meditatively with a stalk of raisins, 'it might be done—by paying. Some quality people do come to my shop. They don't put on their best bonnets and come in their own carriages when they do, but I know 'em. A long bill might be forgiven some lady of rank and fashion if she would invite

Charles to dinner or a dance—such things are done—just to give him the chance of putting his foot into high society. If he were once in, Charlie could maintain himself there. Society would want him when it had seen him. I wouldn't mind paying, but it can't be done. Charlie cares only for officers, and is either at Portsmouth or Plymouth, befooled by them out of his—my money.'

'Send him to me.'

'I don't suppose he would care for the country. Nothing to be done there.'

'He can see the magnificent grounds. He can boat. He can shoot.'

'Grounds anywhere. Mount Edgcumbe open to public on Wednesdays. Boating to be had at Plymouth. This is not the time of year for shooting.'

'True. Let him come to me in the shooting season.'

'Many months to that. Meantime he may have gone to the bad.'

'I invited him to-day to visit me, and he did not decline.'

'Too much of a gent for that,' said the father. 'Mischief is he can't say Nay. He will promise you a call, and never go. I know

him. He promises reform every time he comes for money, but never reforms.'

'He is entangled in a social stratum—a sort of Bohemianism, that will not allow him to reform. Get him out of that, and he will be another man. My Beavis never gives me an hour's concern, because he associates with the family at Court Royal. The Marquess loves him as a brother. Beavis would do your boy an infinity of good. Beavis is a fine, strong-willed, honourable fellow, with a tender heart and a true conscience.'

'Charlie, also, is a fine fellow,' said old Cheek, who could not endure to have another young man contrasted favourably with his own son. 'The mischief is, I was too busy all my days, and could not see enough of him. Only wants his chance now.'

'Well,' said Worthivale, standing up, 'I must be off now. Good-bye, Cheek. It is a real pleasure to me to meet you again.'

'Dine with me the day after to-morrow. Seven punctually.'

'I shall be delighted.'

He left the old man sitting looking before him at the dish of biscuits from which he had exterminated the ratafias. Every now and then he

turned over the biscuits with his finger, but his mind was not on the ratafias. He shook his long head at intervals, and said, 'If that were to happen—if Charlie were to be so weak as that—and he can't say No—least of all to a woman—he would be done for irretrievably.'

CHAPTER XLI.

AN ENTANGLEMENT.

When Charles Cheek came next evening to see his father, he found the old man in a condition of excitement such as made his heart sink, and despair of extracting money from him. He came at his father's dinner time, knowing the impossibility of getting a conversation with him during business hours.

'Are you unwell, father?' he asked, when he observed the perturbed condition of the old man.

'Unwell? Cause to be so.'

'What is the matter with you?'

'Matter? Everything.'

'Any annoyance lately?'

'Annoyance? Ugh!'

What was it that troubled the old man? During dinner he would hardly speak. His pasty face exuded a gloss. He growled and

cast furtive glances at his son, which Charles caught, and was unable to interpret.

'Was Mr. Worthivale here yesterday, governor?'

'Worthivale? Yes. Has a son, never gave him an hour's uneasiness. Came crowing and flapping here because he has a good son.'

'Do you mean, father, that—that——'

'That—that! Yes. Ugh!'

It was impossible to extract anything from the old man during the meal. Charles put on a gay manner, and talked of the weather, of politics, of the regiments ordered abroad, of the depression, of the gossip of society, the improvements effected in torpedoes, Devonshire cream, the Prince of Wales, butterine, Nihilism, Robert Browning, anything, everything that came into his head, but without provoking his father to take part in the conversation.

As soon, however, as the dessert was on the table—the same dessert as the day before—the father drew the dish of raisins and almonds over to himself, waved the servants to withdraw, and burst forth with, 'So—so—clapping the cross on top of St. Paul's! brought your folly to a climax at last. Ugh!'

'What have I done?' asked Charles, as his

spirit quaked at his father's anger, and his consciousness of having deserved it. 'I know I am not as clever as you are, governor, but—you have put matters more forcibly than pleasantly.'

'What have you done? Look at this! Ugh!'

The old man flung a note across the table at him, then made a grab at the almonds, filled his hand, and began to eat them ravenously.

Charles took a letter out of the envelope, unfolded it leisurely, and proceeded to read. He expected to find that his tailor or wine merchant had appealed to his father for payment of a long-standing account. What he saw made the colour rush to his face, and turn him scarlet to the roots of his hair. He glanced up, and saw that his father had riveted his dark piercing eyes on him, whilst he ate savagely almond after almond. The letter was as follows:

'Honoured and monokeratic Sir,—I take my pen in hand, hoping that this finds you as it leaves me. Sir, I feel that I can have no peace of mind till I make you acquainted with our engagement, that is, the engagement of me

and Charlie, and ask your blessing on our approaching union. When Charlie told me he wished I was his wife, you might have knocked me down with a feather, I was that taken aback. I could do no other than give consent, seeing he had behaved so handsome to me, in giving me a necklace of pearls and a beautiful rose-coloured silk gown (which, I am grieved to say, through no fault of mine, has since been injured by Ems water). Charlie and I have been cabineted together, holding hands as agreed and acknowledged lovers, and we only await your blessing, honoured and monokeratic sir, to become the happiest of couples. Charlie has gone up to town to break the news to you, and to solicit your approval. He will tell you of our long attachment, and assure you of my best intentions to love and honour you as a daughter, the which (in prospective) I beg to subscribe myself, JOANNA ROSEVERE.

'C/o Mr. Lazarus,
'The Golden Balls,
'Barbican.

'P.S.—I will send you our united cabinet as soon as the proof comes, which I trust will be to-morrow.'

Charles Cheek's first sensation was amazement; then he felt disposed to laugh. The letter was so droll, so impertinent, and so inferior in style to what he expected from Joe. But all inclination to laugh was taken from him by his father's countenance. The old man was simmering with anger and apprehension.

'Thought so!' burst forth Mr. Cheek, as he stretched his arms so suddenly and violently as to knock over one of the wine-glasses. 'I always feared it would come to this. I hoped against hope. I did trust you would be preserved by Providence from plunging into such an abyss of imbecility.'

'My dear father, you take this too seriously.'

'Take it too seriously!' echoed the old man. 'What is more serious than marriage?'

'But, my dear governor!'

'Don't governor me. I'm your father, I presume, though God forgive me for begetting such an ass.'

The young man was hurt and incensed. His father loved him, but he was rough with him, and had no self-restraint when angered. He spoke coarsely, brutally, all the coarse and brutal things that came off his heart, which is

never done by those who have been put through the mill of culture.

How much the old man loved him, how proud he was of him in spite of his weakness, in spite of the disappointment his pride had encountered, this Charles did not know. Mr. Cheek made no show of affection; or he showed it by licking his cub with a very rough tongue, so rough as to flay him.

'Well!' shouted the old man, 'well!'

'The letter is preposterous,' said Charlie sulkily.

'Preposterous! What I find preposterous is not the letter, but the conduct that provoked the letter.'

'It is not true—it is a hoax,' said the young man.

'Not true!' repeated the old man. He had eaten all the almonds; now he took a bunch of raisins, put it in his mouth, and passionately tore off the fruit with one nip of his teeth, and put the spray on his plate. When he had gulped down the raisins he said, 'Not true! oh no. Cap imbecility with falsehood. Now deny everything. I thought I had a son who was a fool; don't convince me that he is a liar and a coward as well.'

The young man stood up. He turned pale. 'You are my father,' he said, 'and have some privilege of language; but this exceeds what I will endure. I had rather break stones on the road than submit to such insults.'

'Rejoice to see you break stones—do any useful work. At present breaking your father's heart.'

The old man's voice shook.

Charles was moved. 'My dear father,' he said, 'let me explain.'

'Explain! What can you explain?'

'The letter is not serious.'

'Reads deuced like a serious letter.' Mr. Cheek had no sense of humour. What touched his son as comical in the epistle, appeared to him sober earnestness. 'Answer me a few plain questions, Charles; set my mind at rest, or confirm my worst anticipations. Give me the letter.'

The old tradesman took the note and spread it before him, then deliberately put on his spectacles and read the letter over to himself, marking the points with his silver dessert knife.

'Who is Joanna Rosevere?'

'She is a girl I got to know something

about: a nice enough sort of girl, with plenty of brains——'

'That will do. I asked who was Joanna Rosevere. You say a girl. Enough. Now I know she is not a widow. I want none of your lover's raptures.'

'I am not aware that there were any raptures.'

'That will do. I require answers short and to the point. Now, further, is it true that you gave her a pearl necklace and a rose-coloured silk dress?'

'Yes, I did; the pearls were Roman, and the dress——'

'That will do. You gave this girl a necklace of Roman pearls and a rose-coloured silk gown. Did you further have yourself photographed—I beg pardon, cabineted—hand-in-hand with her?'

'Yes, father. The fact is that—that——' Then the recollection of the snail and the bet rushed on his mind; he blushed and did not finish his sentence.

'Very well—or rather, very ill. You were photographed—to be exact, cabineted with the girl, hand-in-hand: I presume I take her right, she don't swear you were closeted with her.'

'Well, I was taken with her. I thought——'

'Never mind what you thought. I want facts, not fancies. Hand-in-hand, cabinet size. I want to know further, did you, as she says, tell her you wished her to be your wife?'

'It came about like this. The other evening when I was there——'

'I am not asking the time of day, nor the circumstances. I only ask, is this a fact?'

'I did say that I wished it were possible for me to make her Mrs. Charles Cheek, or words to that effect. I don't recollect the exact expression.'

'Very well. You asked her to be Mrs. Charles Cheek, but the exact words in which you couched your proposal you do not recollect.'

'It was not a proposal.'

'Not a proposal!' repeated the father. 'Then what am I to conclude from the present of the necklace of Roman pearls, and the rose-coloured silk dress, and the cabinet-sized photograph of yourselves clasping each other's hands? Will you illumine my mind, and tell me, do young gentlemen and young women get carted,

and closeted, and cabineted, hand-in-hand unless engaged?'

'There is no engagement,' protested Charles, bewildered and angry.

'No engagement! You dare to say that! Don't repeat it, as you desire to retain a particle of my regard. I ask, further, what is this Joanna? I know she is a girl. In what capacity is she at the Golden Balls, with Mr. Lazarus, whom I happen to know?'

'She is maid of all work to the old Jew pawnbroker,' answered the young man, driven to desperation, and regardless what he admitted.

'Maid of all work to a Jew pawnbroker,' repeated his father. 'I ask besides, whence comes she? Is she a Jewess?'

'No, she is not.'

'Whence comes she?'

'Picked out of the mud, and pawned for ten shillings,' exclaimed Charles Cheek in a paroxysm of exasperation.

'Picked out of the mud!' What mud?'

'The mud of Sutton Pool.'

'Pawned for ten shillings! By whom?'

'By her mother.'

'And this is the creature you are going to

take to you as wife!' exclaimed the old man, with repressed anger, his face livid and syrupy with emotion. 'With a creature such as this you will squander my hard-earned wealth!'

'I tell you father, it is a hoax.'

'Don't tell me that.' Mr. Cheek brought his great fist down on the table with a crash that made the decanters leap and the glasses spin. 'Now, sir, do you mean to marry her? If you do, I cast you off utterly and for ever.'

'No, I don't want to do that. I tell you the letter is a hoax. Read it—you can see by the style that it is.'

'I have read it. I can see as well as you. I am not to be hoodwinked, and to be told that red is green, and the moon is cheese, and believe it. I have listened patiently to your explanation. You have so compromised yourself with this girl, on your own admission, that if you fail, you render yourself actionable for breach of promise.'

'There was no promise,' persisted the young man.

'Is a jury likely to believe that, when they have heard of the pearls and the rose silk, and seen the billing and cooing doves in the

cabinet? I tell you they will assess the damages at a thousand pounds.'

'There was no agreement. It is a mistake. I can't think what Joanna was at writing such a letter.'

'Do you want to marry her?' asked his father.

'No, of course not. I never did. I only said something about making her Mrs. Charles Cheek in joke.'

'The joke is likely to be expensive pleasantry. But it was no joke. You neither of you regarded it as a joke, or you would not have been photographed together. Now you come to me to get you out of this predicament. I won't have the scandal of a case of breach of promise in the papers. It might affect my business. We must come to an accommodation. How old is the girl?'

'Seventeen or eighteen.'

'Has she relations to advise her?'

'Not one.'

'There is, however, that fox, Lazarus.'

'She will never consult him.'

'What will she take to let you off? I dare say that if I go down with a hundred pounds in my pocket, and offer it her with one hand, and

a written renunciation of you in the other, before she has had time to consider and ask advice, she will sign and set you free.' He looked questioningly at his son.

A change came over Charles's face. A light had sprung up before him. He leaned back in his chair, and burst into a fit of laughter.

'It is no laughing matter,' said the elder Cheek grimly. 'This may cost us a thousand. Juries estimate damages by the income of the father-in-law. Deuced lucky you will be if I can clear you for a hundred! You know the girl: will she take a hundred?'

'I am sure she will. Give me the money, and let me go down to Plymouth and settle it with her.'

'No,' answered the father, 'you are too weak. The job must be done by me at once. Let me see—to-morrow: impossible, engaged. Must make arrangements. Day after, yes; and, Charles, you go to Mr. Worthivale at Kingsbridge for a month, or better, six weeks, to be out of the way. He comes here to dinner to-morrow, when I will settle with him. Go.'

When Charles Cheek got into the street he

exploded into laughter. 'The little rogue!' he exclaimed. 'Whoever would have thought it? The hundred pounds she promised she gets out of my father. She has cost me a bad quarter of an hour, though.'

CHAPTER XLII.

NIBBLING.

Next evening, punctually at seven, Mr. Worthivale arrived. To honour his presence, two additional dishes were added to the dessert—one of dried figs, the other of preserved ginger. Also a bottle of claret was decanted. Mr. Cheek had not settled down into his usual composure; his excitement made him more talkative than usual, and induced him to fill out his sentences, and not present them in a somewhat less truncated shape. His talkativeness, however, did not manifest itself until after the servants had withdrawn. Then his reserve gave way. He pulled an envelope out of his pocket and threw it to his guest.

'Look at that, Worthivale! Got it this morning. Charles has made a fool of himself. Got entangled with a wench dredged from the social depths. Engaged! Cost something to

set him free. However'—he rattled his pocket—'I'm not like one of your dukes; I've money in my own pocket when there's need. I haven't to go cap in hand to others.'

The steward winced. Then he said, studying the photograph, 'I am sure I know that face. It is familiar to me. Where can I have seen it?'

'Of course. That is Charlie.'

'Yes; but the other—the girl? She—it must be, yet I can hardly believe it—it must be our servant, Joanna!'

'Joanna is her name.'

'The maid left us under somewhat unsatisfactory circumstances—altogether puzzling.'

'That I can well believe.'

'She had been before with a Mrs. Delany.'

'She is now with a Jew pawnbroker, as maid of all work.'

'This must be broken off,' said Mr. Worthivale. 'I never quite made out the why and wherefore of her leaving my house. She ran away.'

'I am going to buy her off,' answered Mr. Cheek; 'but what comfort is that to me, when my boy may be committing a similar folly again to-morrow?'

Mr. Worthivale was still considering the photograph.

'Her face is striking,' he said, 'and she has eyes that sparkle; they are perfectly effervescing with intelligence. Beavis took against her; he suspected her from the outset, but I cannot say why. This is a very odd story. Your son's acquaintance with her must be short. She left us at Christmas. She was clever, but unable to read and write.'

'She wrote me a letter. I have it in my pocket—here it is. Almost ashamed, however, to let you see it.'

Mr. Worthivale looked at the letter. 'I know about the pink silk dress,' he said. 'She had it when she came to us. It was spoiled, as she describes in this letter, by some mineral water getting spilled over it. The Roman pearls also—yes. She sent them to Lady Grace Eveleigh after her disappearance. Lucy told me of it. They came with a letter, but I supposed she had got some one to write it for her. The girl is not lost to good; she showed great respect and attachment to her ladyship. Perhaps this letter was written for her; and yet'—he mused—'yet there were some odd

circumstances about her departure which made Beavis think her ignorance simulated.'

'Did she steal anything from your house?'

'No, I cannot say we missed money or plate; in fact, nothing. No, I cannot charge her with that.'

'Sorry for that,' said old Cheek. 'It would have made my course easier. Police case then.'

'Your son must in no case marry such a person,' said the steward gravely. 'It would be an ugly scandal.'

'He shall not. I buy her off. Allow the boy to visit you for a month or so till this affair is blown over.'

'Certainly. I will bring him into good society. The company of Beavis will be profitable. I may find means of introducing him to the Marquess and Lord Ronald. There are nice people in our neighbourhood. There are the Sheepwashes—some fine girls, much admired, and of good family. Who can tell? Charles may form an attachment for one of them, and so get his foot into society. They have not much of their own except blood, and that is just what you require.'

'Nothing would please me better.'

'Yes, we must get Charles into good society, and then he will lose the taste for low associations.'

'The boy has his points,' said Mr. Cheek. 'Can't help loving him. Admire his gentlemanly ways. Got them from his mother. Your family have always been gentlefolks.'

'Yes; we were squires once, in Cornwall, but lost our property in the usual way, and went down into business.'

Then Mr. Worthivale turned the conversation to the Kingsbridge estates, and the advantages of lending money on them. He admitted that the Duke was in want of a few thousands, but then the investment was so secure. Turkish Government, Egyptian Khedives, Argentine Republics borrowed and could not pay. They were broken reeds, but an English duke was a pillar of strength. It would not be a bad excuse for introducing Charles to the family, if his father was inclined to accommodate it. At this bold proposition Mr. Cheek grew stiff, congealed, and frowned. The steward went on, now he had begun, unabashed, to show the great securities the Duke could offer, the advantages from a pecuniary point of view that would accrue to Mr. Cheek by thus investing his

money. Mr. Cheek listened, and said nothing in reply one way or the other.

'There are a couple of mortgages that have been notified which must be met, amounting to about fifty thousand,' he said. 'If you would take these over, it would be a convenience to the family, you would have a safe investment, and you would have conferred on them an obligation which they would not forget.'

'Fifty thousand!' said Mr. Cheek. 'I have more than that to dispose of, thank goodness; the Monokeratic Principle continues to bring in a good profit annually, and I must invest what I make somewhere and somehow.'

'Really,' said the steward, 'a hundred thousand would not come amiss.'

'Ah!' exclaimed Cheek senior, 'go on, hundred and fifty—two hundred—two hundred and fifty——'

'You do not hear me out. A couple of mortgages must be transferred or paid off. The Duke has not the ready money, and he would therefore wish the transfer. The one is on the manor of Kingsbridge, the other on the Court Royal estate. Why, the house itself cost seventy thousand—there is absolutely no risk.'

'If I were to take these over, it would be merely because I do not see my way at present to a better investment. When I do see one I shall call them up. I don't care for your four and half and four and three-quarters. If I were to take these mortgages, your people would be put in the same box in a few years' time when I wanted to release my capital.'

'Oh, in two or three years that can be done without difficulty. The Duke only requires accommodation for the moment.'

'Whence will the money come?'

'Don't trouble your head about that. Money can always be found with such estates. Why, they bring in forty thousand per annum.'

'Land can always be sold,' said Cheek. 'If the money be not forthcoming when I want it, I will sell them up, or they must drop a farm or two into the market.'

'I'll tell you what, Cheek. If it ever comes to that, try and secure Bigbury. That is the site for a second Torquay, climate warm as Penzance, and not as rainy; looks south, scenery lovely, Plymouth accessible. He who has capital, and likes to spend it there, can realise in no time an enormous fortune. Come,

what do you say to my proposal? You have a friend at court in me, who knows all the advantages.'

Mr. Cheek rubbed his nose with his fork, wherewith he had been eating preserved ginger, and left a trickle of juice upon it.

'I should like to see the place,' he said cautiously.

'Come down, then.'

Suddenly Cheek jerked forward his arms, and said, 'I will.'

'And as I return to-morrow, I can take Charles with me, and get him settled in. I expect to see the agent for the mortgagee on the twenty-third at my place. Suppose you are there to meet him. Then nothing is more easy than a transfer.'

'I go down to Plymouth to-morrow to settle this unpleasant matter of the girl. We can travel together.'

'Then return by way of Kingsbridge.'

'Cannot. Must be in town by night express, but by Wednesday I'll be with you.'

Mr. Worthivale was delighted; the fish was nibbling and nigh hooked.

Neither spoke for some minutes, as each was

engaged with his own thoughts and with drinking port.

Presently Mr. Cheek said, as he dipped his napkin in his finger-glass and wiped the syrup off his nose, 'I wish you would tell me what was suspicious about that girl who has entangled Charles. If she has done anything to make her afraid of being found out, I might give her a scare, and bring her to an humble frame of mind. A knowledge of particulars will help me.'

The steward then related the circumstances.

'Beavis caught her making an analysis of the accounts!' exclaimed Mr. Cheek. 'Why, the thing is improbable on the face of it. What could such a girl want with it?'

'Nothing that I can see. I said so to Beavis, but Beavis was very positive. She had the books out, she must have searched my pockets to get the key, and she had her head resting on the extracts she had taken. When Beavis roused her, she knocked over the lamp, and slipped her notebook away in the dark.'

'Did Beavis question her?'

'No; she bolted.'

'Bolted at once?'

'Yes; she did not wait to be questioned.'

'And she went——'

'We did not trace her. We had no idea whither she had betaken herself.'

'Now you know. She is with a Jew. Probably went straight to him. I know the man. He is a money-lender as well as a pawnbroker. There was a time when he helped me. Charles has been in his clutches before now. A dangerous man, worth more than you would fancy. Has he any interest in the affairs of the Duke?'

'None whatever.'

'Who are the holders of the mortgages? Have you their names? Are any Jews among them?'

'Yes, several.'

'Bad,' said Cheek. 'The Jews play into each other's hands, hook on to each other like the links of a fetter.'

'You do not mean to connect the act of the girl with the mortgagees?'

'I should not be surprised. I find no other explanation. Beavis thinks so, probably. She came to you pretending inability to read and write?'

'Yes.'

'The girl is no ordinary girl,' said Mr. Cheek uneasily. 'I doubt if she will let off

Charles as cheap as a hundred pounds. I must inquire into this matter. Must see Lazarus. Haven't seen or smelt him for years.'

'I don't see what Lazarus has to do with the matter. The girl came to me from Mrs. Delany. I suppose that after leaving me, and having no character, she was forced to take what situation she could.'

'Charles can tell us. I hear his voice in the hall. He must have known her before she went to you, if she had the silk dress and beads in your house.—Charles,' he said as his son entered, 'catechising continued.'

The young man had recovered his buoyancy.

'By all means, father, but not in public.'

'Want to know whether that person you were talking of with me yesterday has been long in present situation.'

'All her life,' answered Charles promptly. 'That is, since she was twelve years old.'

'Was she ever in service with a Mrs. Delany?'

'Wife of Colonel Delany,' explained Mr. Worthivale.

'Not to my knowledge; certainly not recently.'

'Where was she before Christmas?' asked the steward.

'That I cannot say. Possibly then she may have been at the Colonel's, but I do not know.'

'Where was she before that?' asked his father.

'On November the fifth she was at the Barbican, where she had been since childhood. She was away till Christmas, and then returned, and has been there ever since.'

Cheek looked at Worthivale and shook his head.

'Sent,' he said.

CHAPTER XLIII.

'SHARES?'

TIME was money to Mr. Cheek. He did not allow the grass to grow under his feet. Consequently, on reaching Plymouth he went at once to the Golden Balls. Mr. Cheek was a clear as well as a hard-headed man; he was a rapid thinker, and prompt in forming and acting on his decisions. He was one of those conquering men who conquer because dominated by self-assurance. He was headstrong and intolerant, because he was incapable of seeing from any other standpoint than his own, and of allowing that any other view was admissible. These are the heroes who have the world at their feet. What he willed he had always been able to carry out, because he cared for no one who opposed him. The public was the ass on which he had ridden ever since he began business. He knew perfectly its moods and

maladies. He was indifferent to its wants, save so far as they affected him and helped in his business. Humbug was with him a form of advertisement—a means to an end. He was not himself a humbug, he was even brutally straightforward, but the public demanded cant of the man who posed before them as a politician, a preacher, or a trader, and Mr. Cheek donned it. In his domestic relations he was truthful, honest, and direct; in his relations with the public he was perfectly unscrupulous. He had a code of ethics for dealings within his home circle, but that home circle was limited now, it was contained within his waistband; he had none at all for dealings outside. He was a hard man, but he had a tender point—love for and pride in his son, a love that met with little response because ill-expressed, and a pride that met with rude shocks. He was an ambitious man. For long his ambition had been to make money. Now he was ambitious to make Charles a gentleman. But he did not know how to set about it. He had sent him, as a boy, to private schools, and, despising the classics, had refused to put him at an university. From dread of losing him from under his eye, he had opposed his going into the army; now he was

conscious that he had made a mistake, but too proud to admit it. He was angry with society for not taking up Charles into it. Why should it not? Every day he heard of society letting down its net and drawing it up into its heaven, like the sheet of St. Peter's vision, full of all sorts of strange beasts. Why was not Charles accepted? If society would not take up Charles, society must be cut down to his level.

He entered the shop of the Golden Balls with firm tread, and with his usual brusque and determined manner. Joanna was there. Towards dusk more business was done than at other times of the day. One gas jet was flaring near her head, accentuating her features. Mr. Cheek did not care in the least whether she was good-looking or the reverse. He looked at her no more than to satisfy himself that this was the same girl who had been photographed with his son.

'Your name is Joanna Rosevere,' he said.

Joanna stood up at once, and turned the gas so as to throw the light full on his face, and off her own.

'And you,' she said quietly—'you are Mr. Cheek of the Monokeratic Principle.'

'I received a letter from you on the 12th instant.'

'Which I posted on the 11th instant.'

'You have not a leg to stand on,' said Mr. Cheek roughly. 'My son is a fool, but not such a fool as to propose to make you his wife. He swears he never asked you.'

She made no reply, but stood opposite him with her hands on the counter, her face in shadow, studying him.

'Now look here,' he said further: 'in an amicable way I don't mind squaring off. If you choose to fight, I'm your man, with thousands at my disposal, and quite prepared to chuck away thousands in law. What do you say?'

'Nothing.'

'Perhaps you suppose that law in England is made for the purpose of redressing wrongs. No such thing. Law is made for the maintenance of lawyers. Justice is sold in England, and he with the longest purse wins; he can appeal from court to court, and ruin his adversary. You have nothing. What lawyer will look at you? Now—are you disposed for a compromise?'

'I will take a hundred pounds.'

'A hundred cocoa-nuts!' scoffed Mr. Cheek.

'Say five-and-twenty, and I will listen to you.'

'I have named the sum,' answered Joanna, and reseated herself, took up her sewing, and proceeded with it as if nothing had interrupted her. Mr. Cheek watched her thread a needle. Her hand did not shake.

'You will get nothing if you refuse my offer.'

She made no answer, but continued stitching.

'Charles is ashamed of himself already for having even spoken to you. What are you? A gutter girl?'

'Lower than that, sir,' exclaimed Joanna, without raising her head. 'The gutters empty into Sutton Pool, and I came out of the blackest mud in the bottom of the Pool.'

'Charles has not a penny of his own.'

'He has less than a penny, sir. He is in debt.'

'Will you give him up?'

'You know my terms.'

He stood watching her, puzzled at and admiring her self-possession.

'Very well,' he said, thrusting a hundred-

pound note across the counter with one hand, and a paper with the other.

'Sign this, and you shall have the money.'

She stood up, dipped the desk pen in ink, and appended her signature to the renunciation of her claims. Then she reseated herself, having taken the bank note with an involuntary sigh, folded it, and put it in her bosom.

'So—you, who could not read nor write at Mr. Worthivale's, can read what is penned here, and sign your name to it in a bold hand—the same hand that wrote to me on the 11th instant.'

Joanna looked up at him in surprise.

'I know all about it. Mr. Worthivale is a sort of relation, and has told me. What took you to him with forged testimonials, eh? Both you and the lady who gave the character have become actionable. Aware of that, eh?'

Joanna made no reply.

'What took you there?'

'I was sent,' she answered.

'I said so—sent by Lazarus.'

She did not answer.

'Why did you examine the books and make extracts from them? Was that what Lazarus sent you there for, eh?'

She remained silent.

'Never mind. Always make a cat squeak by pinching its tail. Make you speak. Where is Lazarus?'

'He is not at home, sir. He will be here directly. Take a chair.'

Mr. Cheek did so. Just then, in came a woman with a Britannia metal teapot, milk jug, and sugar bowl, which she wanted to dispose of.

Mr. Cheek listened to the disputation over its value, to the remorseless way in which Joanna pointed out its defects, the way in which she flouted the poor woman when she named a reasonable sum as that which she demanded for them, the battle fought over a few pence when the shillings were settled, and the ignominious rout of the seller. As he listened Mr. Cheek's interest was quickened. He looked more attentively at the girl, and observed her keen face and brilliant eyes. 'She is no fool,' he said to himself. 'I wish I had her in my shop. She'd be worth pounds to me.'

Then in came Lazarus. Mr. Cheek gave him a nod. The Jew recognised him, uttered a crow of admiration, and rushed at him with both hands extended. Mr. Cheek at once put

his hands under his coat-tails, and repelled Lazarus with a look.

'A word with you,' said he, 'in your den.'

Lazarus bowed and pointed the way. Cheek knew the passage and the room well enough, though many years had passed since he had seen them.

'Take a sedan, sir,' begged the Jew, bowing at every comma. 'You will find it easy, cuts off the draughts on all sides, sir. I will sit on my bed, my dear Mr. Cheek. Lord! what pleasure to see an old customer again! I hear affairs are flourishing with you, Mr. Cheek. I hear golden tidings of you, sir; and to think I had a hand in the making of you! Well, humble instruments, sir! very humble.'

'A hand in the undoing of my son, if in the making of me,' said Mr. Cheek grimly. 'Which latter proposition I dispute.'

'No sudden embarrassment? Want a helping hand over a stile?' inquired Lazarus fawningly.

'No such luck for you?' answered Mr. Cheek.

'Then how may I meet your wishes?'

'I am about,' said Mr. Cheek pompously, 'to make large investments in mortgages on

the property of a great duke in these parts, his Grace of Kingsbridge. I understand that he is in immediate need of a considerable sum; and as I have my tens and hundreds of thousands at command, I am inclined to lend him what he wants on the security of some of his estates. Now'—suddenly—'what have you to do with the Duke's affairs? You sent that clever girl outside to Court Royal to pry into and find out how the Duke's books stood. What is your stake?'

Lazarus was so startled that he could not speak. He sat with open mouth and eyes, staring at his visitor.

'Know all about it,' said Mr. Cheek coolly. 'Steward is my relation. He and your girl out there have told me all but one thing. What is your interest in the Kingsbridge estates?'

Lazarus pulled out his handkerchief and wiped his face.

'You—you are going to lend money to the Duke!' he exclaimed. 'I did not suppose you such a gull. Do you know that his land is mortgaged to its full value in times like these? It is a bad business. Do not soil your fingers with it.'

'Can take care of myself. Want no advice,' said Mr. Cheek unmoved.

'You are bewildered and befooled by aristocratical hocus-pocus. I've seen the sort of thing done on a platform with a few passes, and a man loses his power of will. He does everything the electro-biologist orders. The Duke has made his passes over you—be on your guard. The case is hopeless.'

'What have you to do with the matter?'

'I—I? Oh yes! I have lent money. I have taken up a mortgage or two. I've burnt my fingers. Perhaps you would like to see what the burdens on the estate are. You shall see.'

He went to his closet and extracted a memorandum-book, and offered it to his visitor.

'Is this what was extracted by your girl?' asked Cheek.

Lazarus winced.

'I see your name nowhere here,' said the great trader.

'No—no—but I am there. What do you think of that? Is it ugly or is it beautiful?'

'Very ugly indeed, for the Duke. Nevertheless, I don't see any great risk. I shall take over the two mortgages that have been called in.'

'Others are going to follow,' said the Jew. 'I have been to several of the mortgagees, who are my friends, belong to my race, and they are all stirring. Have you seen fowlers out wild-duck shooting when the winds drive the birds near shore? The men make a ring of boats and row inwards, driving the ducks and geese together till they start to fly, and then—bang! bang! bang! from all sides, and down they fall in hundreds. We'll bring down our ducal ducks. Will you join in the sport?'

Lazarus looked hard at his visitor, and Cheek measured him with his eyes.

'You are not moving out of love for the Duke?' said the Jew derisively; 'not out of desire to uphold so grand a pillar of the Constitution?'

'The Duke and the ducal family are nothing to me. I want their land.'

'Their land and residence; Court Royal, with its park.'

Lazarus laughed maliciously.

Cheek looked hard at him. 'And you—you would do the same?'

'Of course. I want their land. I want to smoke them out, smoke 'em out like foxes.'

'Lion this,' said Cheek, 'smoked by fox.

Joking apart, what is your game? You want the land. You have an eye on Bigbury Bay, to make of that a second Torquay. You want to work the slate quarries and the petroleum shale. Bah! you have not the capital.'

'Look here,' said Lazarus; 'let us go shares. Your kinsman Worthivale has been deluding you with assurances of solvency. The family never can pay its debts. I will foreclose on Court Royal. Do not help them against me. Others will follow. They are all ready. It is like an avalanche; pop! and it shoots down and buries all below. You lie by and buy the land as we or the Duke sell. Pick it up bit by bit.'

'I shall go to Kingsbridge, and see the place.'

'Go, by all means. Then you will be a judge if fortunes are to be made there. Bigbury Bay—that a second Torquay! You must find the site first, and the shelter. Why, the fishermen stand on the cliffs, and angle off them into deep water. Will you dig out a city in the rocks, like Petra? Slate at Kingsbridge! We have slate more accessible to Plymouth than that. Oil shale!—it has been tried. Plenty of shale, but no oil. Or do you want to oust the

great family, and settle into its nest? Lend them money, and you will be done. The Marquess will marry an heiress, and wash his debts away. You will get your money back, but you won't get into Court Royal.'

'You are eager to keep me off,' said Mr. Cheek. 'What is your stake?'

'Fifty thousand, mine. I lead the way; I am Mr. Emmanuel, with my thumb on Court Royal and Kingsbridge. Others are coming on, till the family is crushed.'

'Fifty thousand!'

'Yes. Do not let us fight. Let us share the spoil together.'

Mr. Cheek made no reply. He was considering.

'You are going to Kingsbridge, eh?' said Lazarus. 'Be on your guard against the great people there. They do not regard you as belonging to the same order of creatures as themselves. They hold themselves a long way ahead of the like of us.'

'The like of us!' repeated Mr. Cheek indignantly. 'Don't class yourself with me.'

'They make use of us, squeeze us as lemons, and throw the rind away. If they think they will get money or information out of you they

will be gracious enough. Your cousin Worthivale will give them a hint to use you well. They will dazzle you with their magnificence, condescend to you most graciously, stupefy your mind with admiration of their polish and amiability and urbanity, then, when they have made what they wanted out of you, they will slam the door in your face and pass you unnoticed in the street. Be on your guard. I have forewarned you. If you want them to remain amiable and gracious, you must have their thumbs in a vice.'

CHAPTER XLIV.

A STARTLING PROPOSAL.

The serenity of security was gone from Court Royal. Though all went on there unaltered to the eye of the casual visitor, a change had passed over the house, like the touch of the first October frost on the park trees. And as the trees show their sensibility of coming winter in various tints, the maple turning crimson and the beech gold, the oak russet and the sycamore brown, so did the threat of impending ruin affect the various members of the household variously. Hitherto the house of Kingsbridge had been regarded as unbreakable as the Bank of England, as unassailable as the British Constitution. Now the faith had received a shock so rude that it could never recover its child-like simplicity. The windows of heaven were open, the fountains of the great deep were broken up, and in the deluge what

would survive? The ark had sprung a leak, and all the household were aware of it and restless. On every face a shadow had fallen. The members of the family talked each other into momentary encouragement, and then parted to fall back into despondency. The Duke was the least affected. After he had recovered the agitation into which he had been thrown by the paragraph in the Society paper, he put the whole matter from him. He had known all his life that the estates were encumbered, he had known also all his life that this had not precluded him from spending money. Hitherto, when he needed it, money had been raised, it could be raised again. There was always water in the well. The pump worked badly. The fault lay in Worthivale; he was old, and creaky, and clumsy.

Lord Ronald, on the other hand, worried himself with schemes for raising money. He came into his nephew's room every day with a new suggestion as impracticable as the last, and when Saltcombe threw cold water over it he visited the Archdeacon, in hopes of gaining encouragement from him. At table, before company and the servants, the General was cheerful, told his old stories, abused the new

army regulations, wondered what the service was coming to, when the first necessity for advancement was to gain the favour of the newspaper reporters. He was less sanguine in his views than heretofore, that was the only evidence he gave in public that his mind was troubled.

Lord Edward remained at Court Royal, in spite of peremptory recalls from Lady Elizabeth, who insisted on his return to Sleepy Hollow, where cracks had appeared in the walls, and water was percolating through the roof, and the lamb-like curate was beginning to kick like a calf. Lord Edward saw that a crisis had arrived in the fate of the family, and he saw that his duty—the paramount duty—called him to remain at Court Royal. Where duties clashed the superior must be obeyed, and his duty to the family stood above all others.

The Marquess was altered since his return from Plymouth. The alteration was not in appearance only, it was also in manner. He had been hitherto agreeable in society, he was now silent. Nothing roused him out of his depression. Before he had been apathetic, now he was dispirited. He accepted the impending ruin as inevitable, and made no efforts to arrest it.

Beavis noticed the change and regretted it. The change was not for the better, but for the worse.

Only Lady Grace remained herself—cheerful, loving, trustful. She devoted herself more than ever to her brother, and, without appearing to observe his melancholy, combated it with all the weapons of her woman's wit. She forced him out of himself; she called her uncles and Lucy to her aid. Only when she was alone did the tears come into her eyes, and her brightness fade. Her brother was now her first concern, though she did not understand the occasion of his mood. She attributed it to despair of saving the family, consequent on the failure of his engagement to Dulcina Rigsby. Although she thought chiefly of him, she did not think exclusively of him. She did not even know the main cause of trouble. She had resolved that some of the property must be sold, and that the establishment must be reduced. She dared to broach the subject to her father, in hopes of persuading him to realise the gravity of the occasion, but he refused to listen to her. 'My dear Grace,' he said, 'talk of what you understand. If you want any more gardenias—and the new sorts are very fine—

order them. Tell Messrs. Veitch to send you a *Lapageria alba*; we have only the *rosea* in the greenhouse. But, my dear, not another word about matters concerning which you know nothing.'

Somehow—it is impossible to say how—the knowledge that the existing order was menaced had reached the servants' hall, and the greatest consternation prevailed. Mr. Blomfield and Mrs. Probus, the senior footmen, the coachman, and the lady's-maid of Lady Grace put their heads together, and concluded that the true remedy lay in a reduction of the establishment. Lord Ronald must go. Lord Edward must not be there so much, and he must not bring that 'dreffful Lady Elizabeth, as is so mean, and pokes her nose into everything.'

'Far be it from me to suggest,' said Mr. Blomfield, 'that Lady Grace is not heartily welcome to all we have, and to the best of everything; still, her ladyship can't be kept on nothing. She really ought to be married and go. The Marquess is different. We must put up with him; he is the heir, and will be Dook some day.'

'But if you send away Lady Grace, I must go too,' argued the lady's-maid.

'Under those circumstances,' said the butler, 'we will make an effort, and keep her.'

Upstairs, at the same time, Lady Grace was with Lucy going over the list of servants.

'Dear Lucy, it is very painful. I can't bear to send one away, they are all so nice, and good, and obliging. It is not that I care for myself, but that I fear they will never get another place where they will all be so happy and comfortable together.'

Owing to the tension of spirits at the Court, Beavis and Charles Cheek were there a great deal. Charles had been introduced as the cousin of Beavis and Lucy, and as his manners were gentlemanly, and his conversation pleasant, and his spirits unflagging, he was a welcome guest. Neither he nor Mr. Worthivale had thought it necessary to mention his relations to the monokeratic system, of which possibly the ducal family had never heard. Even if they had, Charles would have been received with perfect readiness as the kinsman of Lucy and her father. Lady Grace herself urged Beavis to bring his cousin whenever he could, to cheer the Marquess, and draw the minds of her uncles from the absorbing care.

Charles Cheek was very amusing; he was

full of good stories, and had the tact to be agreeable without forcing himself into prominence. Indeed, he appeared at his best in this society. He knew what good manners were, and no one who saw him suspected the effort it was to him to maintain himself at ease among them. He was like a tight-rope dancer, who seems to be composed and assured on his cord aloft, but who knows himself to be safest and happiest when he is on the solid ground.

He showed sufficient deference to the rank and age of his Grace, and the General and the Archdeacon, to conciliate their favour. With the Marquess he was freer, though always respectful, and Lord Saltcombe said once or twice to Beavis that he liked his cousin, and hoped to see a good deal of him. He invited him to come in the shooting season, and placed his horses at his disposal for hunting. He was asked to take frequent strolls with Lady Grace, and Lucy and the Marquess, when Lord Saltcombe naturally fell to Lucy, and Charles to be companion to Lady Grace. These walks were delightful to Lucy, as her sparkling eyes and glowing cheeks testified. Lady Grace enjoyed them, for Charles was always amusing, sometimes interesting. He was a man with a good

deal of shrewd observation of men and manners, which he used to good effect in conversation. Lady Grace had a sweet voice, thoroughly schooled, and as Charles sang well, with a mellow tenor, and knew his notes fairly, they practised duets together, partly to please themselves, chiefly to give pleasure to the Duke.

The young man was sensible of the charms of Lady Grace; he had never before been in the society of a perfect English lady, and a perfect English lady is the noblest and most admirable of the products of centuries of refinement. The culture of the English lady is a culture of the entire woman, mind and soul, as well as of body, perfect refinement and exquisite delicacy in manner, in movement, in intonation, in thought, and in expression. No man can escape the attraction of such a woman; it seizes him, it raises him, it humbles him. It raises him by inspiring him with the desire to be worthy to associate with such nobility; it humbles him by making him conscious of his own shortcomings.

Charles Cheek had been so little in the society of ladies of any sort, and was so ignorant of the ladies of the best English society, that this association with Lady Grace

exercised over him quite irresistible fascination. He was uneasy when a day passed without his seeing her, and when out of her presence the recollection of her words, and the pleasant way in which she spoke them, formed his great delight. It can hardly be said that he loved her, it was certain that he worshipped her.

'Grace dear,' said Lucy one day to her friend, 'take care what you are about.'

'What do you mean, Lucy?'

'You are throwing your imperceptible threads round that simple young man, and binding him in bonds he will be powerless to drive away.'

'What young man?'

'My cousin Charles.'

'Nonsense, Lucy!' said Lady Grace, colouring slightly and looking vexed.

'You cannot help yourself. You bewitch every one, down to old Jonathan the gardener, and Tom the stable boy. You cannot help it. You have thrown your glamour over my cousin. I can see it. When he leaves this place he will feel like the Swiss exiled from the Alpine air and roses to be pastrycook in Amsterdam. You remember that queer girl we had at the Lodge, and who ran away. You did the same

with her, and she sent you a necklace in token of undying devotion. Now you are playing tricks with Charles. Take care that you do not encourage him to do something equally absurd. As for my father and Beavis, you know very well they would let themselves be cut to pieces in your service.'

On the twenty-second of the month, Mr. Cheek senior arrived, and was invited to dine at the Court, along with his son and the Worthivales. The old trader was highly gratified. He was struck with the grand staircase, the well-lighted magnificent rooms, rich with gilding, pictures, and silk curtains, with the livery servants, and the general ease and luxury. He was courteously received, somewhat ceremoniously, and he had a few words with the Duke, who made himself agreeable, as he could when he chose, by touching on a subject likely to delight the old man.

'What a very nice fellow your son is, Mr. Cheek! He has enlivened our rather dull society of late. I do not know what we should have done without him. Beavis is our usual *pièce de résistance*, but Beavis has been out of sorts lately. We feel under a debt to you for having spared him so long.'

Mr. Cheek held up his head. 'Your Grace is too complimentary.'

'Not at all. I always speak my mind.'

The General came up. 'I am glad to make your acquaintance, sir,' said Lord Ronald; 'though I owe you a grudge, and I do not know that I shall ever be Christian enough to forgive you. Your boy ought to have been in the army.'

'My fault, my lord. Bitterly regret it now—when too late. A mistake.'

'It was a mistake. He is a daring fellow. He was hunting the other day, and took the hedges splendidly. No end of pluck in him. Sad pity he is not in the army.'

The delighted father watched his son all the evening. He did not talk much himself, and Lord Edward and the General found him difficult to get on with. The reason was that his attention was taken up in contemplating his son with admiration and wonder. He could not have been more astonished had he assisted at a miracle. Charles was at ease in this society. Charles could talk, and make the great people listen to him. After dinner Charles played and sang a solo, talked to Lucy Worthivale, and sent her into a fit of laughter, stood in the window

in familiar discussion with the Marquess, then went to the Duke, conversed with him, then at his request sang a duet with Lady Grace. After that Charles was on an ottoman with the lady, talking to her in an animated way, expressing himself with his hands like a Frenchman, whilst her colour came and she smiled. She coloured because she remembered the words of Lucy.

Mr. Cheek was struck with her; her delicate beauty and purity impressed him. He was not afraid of her, but he had not the courage to get up from his place and walk across the room to speak to her. Presently she came over to him, and talked, and the old man felt as though a light shone round him, and a sense of reverence and holy love came upon him. He did not remember afterwards what she said, or what he answered, but thought that he had been in a dream. Afterwards, when she was at the piano again, he watched her, and shook his head, and smiled. Then he looked at Charles turning the pages of her music for her, and he said to himself, 'Charles is a genius! It is not in me. The Duke and that old soldier chap didn't pile it on too much. He is all they said, and more. Worthivale was right. This is the element in which he must swim.'

Mr. Cheek and the steward walked home together, Charles and Beavis went on before.

'Are they not charming people? Is not the house quite perfect?' asked Mr. Worthivale.

'This the style of daily life?' asked Mr. Cheek.

'Always the same—of course.'

'And the income, the debts, the mortgages, the outs always the same?' said Mr. Cheek. 'Nothing for it but a smash-up. Seen the accounts. Balance bad. I—even I—with the Monokeros on my back, couldn't afford it.'

'You have never seen this sort of life before,' said the steward reproachfully, 'and so—it rather surprises you. Splendid, is it not? and so homely and genial too.'

'Won't go on,' said the man of business. 'Can't do it on the balance. Col-lapse.'

'I hope not—I trust not.'

'I can help them. I can save them.'

'I knew it, I was sure of it,' exclaimed the delighted steward.

'I see they like Charlie, and Charlie likes to be on this shelf. I don't. I ain't suited to it. Set me on end on the floor. Don't roll

me up and chuck me aloft on a top shelf. Charlie can take that place, and he shall. I like to see him there.'

'He conducts himself very well, but what has he to do with the present emergency?'

'Everything. Charlie shall make Lady Grace his missus. Then he'll belong to the aristocracy, whatever I may be.'

'What!' Mr. Worthivale sprang back, and his hat fell off.

'Charlie shall make his proposals to Lady Grace, and I'll find two hundred thousand pounds to clear off such of the mortgages as are now troublesome. The Monokeros is still alive, and bringing in money for Charlie and his deary. If this ain't a handsome offer show me one that is. If you don't like my shop, go to another.'

'Are you mad? You must be mad!' exclaimed the steward, too amazed to be indignant. '*Your* SON and SHE! What are you thinking of?'

'What am I thinking of? Mutual accommodation. As you said to me, I want blood and they want money. Is it a deal?'

Mr. Worthivale stared at his guest, and remained rooted to the spot.

'Madman!' he gasped. 'Is nothing sacred with you?'

'As you like,' said the trader indifferently. 'Take my offer or reject it. I can do without better than you.'

'Not a word of this raving nonsense to a soul,' said Mr. Worthivale, grasping his arm. 'Lord! I wouldn't have anyone hear of this for all I am worth.'

'As you like,' said Mr. Cheek, putting his hands in his pockets. 'Those are my terms.'

CHAPTER XLV.

RETRIBUTION.

NEXT morning Mr. Cheek was silent at breakfast. Charles was not in his usual lively mood. His father had told him in his room, the night before, of his plan, on their return from the Court. He had told him also that Mr. Worthivale had refused to entertain it. Charles was startled and gratified at the prospect; startled, because he had not dared to wish it, startled also, because he was not sure that he did wish it; gratified, because he saw open to him the means of taking a place in society that had been hitherto inaccessible. He was silent because, thoughtless though he was, the conjuncture of affairs was one that forced him to think.

Worthivale was nervous and agitated at breakfast. Drops stood on his brow, and he was unable to pour out the coffee, his hand

shook so, and he was forced to pass over the duty to Beavis. Something had occurred, more than the proposal of old Cheek, to unnerve him.

After breakfast Mr. Cheek drew the steward aside. 'Well, now,' he said, 'with morning come cool counsels. Shall we deal?'

'How can you speak in such terms?' asked the steward. 'Do you not perceive that it is impossible for the daughter of such an illustrious house to accept—— Stuff! as well propose an alliance between an eagle and a crocodile! Preposterous! simply preposterous!'

Mr. Cheek stretched his arms, then drew his finger over his lips. 'There is nothing preposterous in it,' he said. 'Worse matches have been made. One likes apples, t'other likes onions. To my mind, I am the more respectable party of the two. I have lifted myself out of nothing, by my industry, into affluence. They have degraded themselves, by wastefulness, out of wealth into bankruptcy.'

'Will you not help the family, without conditions?'

'Do you take me for a fool? What are they to me?'

'Surely—surely, to obtain their esteem, to deserve the regard of the Duke, the respect

of Lord Edward and Lord Ronald, the gratitude of the Marquess—that is something.'

'Not worth a farthing to me,' answered Mr. Cheek roughly. 'Put it up to auction; who will bid?'

'Besides, you would not be giving your money, only investing it most safely.'

'I have made my proposals,' said the elder Cheek. 'To them I stick as cobbler's wax.'

'I cannot listen to you!' exclaimed the steward. 'You might as well sue for the moon.' He paced the room, swinging his arms; he was hot with indignation.

'I do not want the moon. I want that young woman'—Worthivale shivered—'for my son. She'll make a tidy daughter-in-law. As for those old codgers'—Worthivale's blood curdled (their lordships—*codgers*!)—'they are like turkey-cocks in a barn-yard, ruffling feathers and gobbling at the little fowl. *She's* other. Wouldn't give herself high and mighty airs.'

'For Heaven's sake!' cried the steward, putting his hands to his ears, 'have done, or I will leave the room.'

'Needn't go,' said Mr. Cheek. 'I'm off, next coach. Time valuable. Can't afford to

waste it like a parcel of gorgeous good-for-noughts.'

'Going!' exclaimed the steward aghast, and standing still. 'You are not going to-day. To-day is the twenty-third: I invited you to be here when we meet Crudge, the solicitor for Mr. Emmanuel.'

'Can't waste *my* time. Sheer waste. Made my proposal—refused. Enough; I go.'

'But the investment is so good.'

'Know of a score better.'

'But—but you led me to expect——'

'Nothing. Never committed myself. Too old a bird for that. Said I would come and look about me. Have done so, taken stock, and made a bid.'

'Which I refuse.'

'It has not been submitted to the proper parties.'

'If by proper parties you mean the Duke and Lady Grace, I absolutely refuse to mention it to them. They—I mean the Duke—would kick me out of the house. She—Lady Grace—I would not dare to look her in the face again.'

'As you like,' said Mr. Cheek, washing his hands in the air. 'Don't take amiss. When

dry will brush off. I leave by next coach. One thing, however, I do ask. Allow Charles to remain. Don't want him to be back in Plymouth yet. Understand?'

'Let him stay here, by all means.'

'Right. Hope you'll enjoy yourself with the mortgagees. Cheerful company. Pleasant ways, eh? If in distress, and you change your mind, wire. Let the young female give her word of honour that she will take my Charlie, and I am ready with my two hundred thousand. She's not one to go from her word. Now—portmantle.'

'Was there ever such a fool—such a confounded fool!' cried Mr. Worthivale, when Cheek had left the room, as he ran about, holding his head. 'That I should have lived to hear him talk!'

Half an hour later, the great Cheek of the Monokeros was gone, and the hope that had hung on him had fallen and lay broken with many another shattered hope.

'Well!' said the General, entering the dining-room about the hour when the meeting was to take place, 'what says your kinsman to the mortgages? Will he take them?'

'He is a fool, an abject, drivelling fool!'

answered the steward. Lord Ronald sighed. He had buoyed himself on the expectation which Worthivale had confided to him, that relief was certain from this quarter.

'That is not the worst,' said Worthivale, in a low tone, and he trembled and became white and moist.

'What now?'

'By this post,' gasped the steward, 'the—the Insurance Company have given notice——'

'My God! not the Loddiswell mortgage for four hundred thousand?'

Worthivale put his hand to his mouth to cover a groan.

Then they heard a carriage drive up to the garden gate, followed by a ring at the bell. A moment after, the maid announced, 'Mr. Crudge, solicitor,' and the lawyer entered, followed by Lazarus, dressed respectably.

'Good afternoon, my lord. Good afternoon, Mr. Worthivale,' said Crudge, with freshness and confidence. 'Allow me to introduce Mr. Emmanuel.' He presented Lazarus; the General bowed stiffly, Worthivale shook hands. They seated themselves, Lazarus with his back to the light, in the window, behind Mr. Crudge. Presently the Marquess arrived, with Lord

Edward. They bowed to Crudge and Lazarus, and took chairs by the fire, offered them by the steward. With them entered Beavis.

Conversation began on the weather. Crudge talked of the crops—as is correct, to those living in the country—and on land. Lazarus said nothing. So passed ten minutes.

'Let us proceed to business,' said the solicitor, looking at his watch. 'By the way, I bear a note for you, sir, from Messrs. Levi and Moses, who hold the seventeen thousand pound mortgage on Alvington; and also the second, on the same estate, for twenty thousand. I am instructed to act for them. Both must be met in three months from date.'

A silence ensued, broken only by a little, quickly-subdued chuckle in the window.

Then Beavis opened proceedings, by stating that the sudden calling up of mortgages at a time when rents had had to be reduced twenty to twenty-five per cent. all round, and when some rents were in arrear for two and three years, at a time, moreover, when land was at an unprecedentedly low value, was very inconvenient to the Duke, and that he desired the mortgagees to reconsider their demand, and allow time for the recovery of the farmers,

when, in the event of his not being able to transfer the mortgages, or himself find the amount, land would have to be sold.

The solicitor replied that he was acting both for Mr. Emmanuel and for Messrs. Levi and Moses, and he could say that his clients were not disposed to be harsh, but to accord every reasonable indulgence. They, however, did not participate in the sanguine view entertained by his Grace. They believed that rents would fall still lower, that the golden day of British agriculture was set, and the whole industry menaced with extinction. Holding this, they were anxious with promptitude to release their money, that they might invest it elsewhere.

'But, if you proceed to extremities, you will be selling land when it hardly reaches twenty-five years' purchase.'

'Better that than sell when it will not fetch twenty years' purchase. I have heard of desirable properties in North Devon in the market and not a bid made for them at fifteen.'

'But this is in South Devon.'

Mr. Crudge shrugged his shoulders.

'What, then, do you propose, or demand?' asked the General.

'We are ready to meet your convenience as

far as possible. I am instructed to yield so far as this—half the total at the expiration of three months from date of notice, the rest in two equal portions, at intervals of three months.'

Again a sound like a chuckle from the window. The Marquess looked sharply round, but Lazarus, who sat there, was quiet, his face in shadow and illegible.

'Small charities!' said the General. 'Better the sword Miséricorde, which ends the torture with a thrust.'

Silence ensued. Lord Edward and the General looked down ; the eyes of the Marquess were on the fire.

Lazarus watched them eagerly with malicious delight.

'You will go no further?' asked Mr. Worthivale.

'This is the limit imposed on me by my clients. You will understand, I am but the intermediary ; I am obliged to act as directed.'

Worthivale bowed.

Ten minutes of painful silence ensued.

'I see no necessity for prolonging the meeting,' said the Marquess rising.

'None at all, as far as I am concerned,' answered the solicitor.

'Sorry the matter should be ventilated with such freedom in the papers. There was something about it a little while ago, and now the Society papers are still more explicit. There is no mistaking the allusions. If worth while, prosecutions might be begun. Hah!' said Crudge, 'I have them in my pocket. Really, these periodicals are offensive and insulting.'

The colour rushed into the General's face. Lord Edward turned pale, and held the jamb of the chimney-piece to prevent him from falling; a mist formed before his eyes. Lord Saltcombe compressed his lips and clenched his hands. As Crudge offered him the papers with coarse civility, he brushed them aside.

'You want me no further?' he said to Mr. Worthivale.

'No, my lord, there is nothing to be done.'

'Very well; I will consult my uncles at home. I wish you all a good afternoon.'

'A *very* pleasant afternoon to you, my lord,' said Lazarus, also rising, and bowing deeply.

Lord Saltcombe slightly bent his head, and left the room.

Almost immediately after, Lazarus followed;

Crudge was detained but a few minutes. When he also was gone, Lord Ronald looked at his brother.

'Hopelessly ruined—that is the plain English,' he said.

'And satyrs dance and scoff over our grave,' said Lord Edward, pointing to the papers.

The Marquess was walking slowly through the park to Court Royal, when he heard rapid steps behind him. He did not turn to see who followed; then he heard a voice.

'Heigh! Lord Saltcombe! Most noble Marquess, a word with you.'

He arrested his walk, and waited patiently till he was caught up, but without turning his head.

A moment after he saw at his side the man Emmanuel, whom he had scarce noticed at the meeting. The man was panting. He had run to catch him up. Lord Saltcombe waited till he had gained breath to speak. He did not know Lazarus. If he had seen him in past years, it had been but briefly and rarely, and he did not recall his features; besides, Lazarus was oldened and altered since then.

'You do not know me, most noble sir?'

said the Jew, in a tone between deference and defiance.

Lord Saltcombe contented himself with a slight shake of the head.

'I suppose not. Oh, no! of course not! You do not know who Emmanuel is, who holds his grip on your heart? No, I suppose not!'

Lord Saltcombe became impatient; he turned to continue his walk, without speaking.

'Do you know who holds two of your mortgages, and who has worked and stirred up the other mortgagees against you? Who has your own—your own bills in his hands?'

Lazarus walked beside the Marquess, peering into his face with an expression full of vindictiveness. Lord Saltcombe looked in front of him; he made no reply, but the veins in his temples swelled and darkened.

'You do not know, I presume, that I, I hold you all in my power—that you are at my mercy? Do you know who I am?' asked Lazarus starting forward and standing in his way.

'I know that you are an obstruction, and unless you move yourself at once I shall lay my stick across you.'

'Oh, my Lord Cock-of-the-walk!' exclaimed the Jew. 'What airs we give ourselves!'

Lord Saltcombe's eyes lightened. He raised his walking-stick, and would have brought it down on Lazarus had not the Jew hastily added: 'I am Emmanuel Lazarus, of the Barbican, Plymouth!'

Then the stick fell from Lord Saltcombe's hand. He stood still, and looked keenly at the man before him. The pawnbroker had stopped; his attitude was cringing as he shrank from the menaced blow. His eyes glittered with hate.

Lord Saltcombe drew down his hat and folded his arms. 'Well,' he said in a low tone, 'say what you will, I cannot touch you.'

'Ah!' exclaimed Lazarus, 'you may well stand still and look down when you encounter me—me, the man whose home you broke up, whose honour you stained, whose happiness you blighted. What was I? Only a Jew usurer. What were you? A great noble. Now I am in the ascendant, and you grovel. Now it is my turn to cast you down, and put my foot on your proud neck. I will hold you there, writhe as you may to be free. It was I who spoiled your fine matrimonial schemes with the coffee-planter's daughter. It was I

who warned off old Cheek from coming to your assistance. It was I who put your affairs into the Society papers, and made you the talk of the town. It was I who stirred up the other mortgagees to foreclose. I have waited long till I could find a way to hurt you. Did I say just now you were at my mercy? It was a wrong word. I have no mercy in my heart for such as you, only retribution.'

Then Lord Saltcombe looked him full in the face. He was deadly pale, but he did not move a muscle, nor did his lips quiver. He spoke with perfect calmness, the calmness of perfect self-control.

'Mr. Lazarus,' he said, 'I would have sought you out years ago, had I thought the interview would lead to good. But though I did not seek you, I have always desired to meet you, that I might express to you my sorrow, my deepest sorrow, for the wrong I did you. Perhaps it was weakness and want of resolution which hindered my going direct to you. Providence has now brought us face to face, and I hasten to express my contrition. You can say to me nothing that I have not said, and said daily, almost hourly, to myself. You speak of retribution. She—she——' his

voice vibrated for a moment. 'She has been overtaken by the hand of God, and has suffered where she sinned. I do not hope, I do not wish to escape the chastisement of Heaven. Why should I go free, when she has endured the penalty? If it has pleased the Almighty to touch me in the place where most sensitive, in my pride and love for my family—His will be done. My only regret is that I must draw down with me other, and those very dear heads.' He was silent for a moment, with his eyes on the ground. For a moment he needed silence, to recover that command over himself which he felt was slipping from him. Lazarus said nothing. His face was perplexed with contending emotions—hate, surprise, disappointment.

'Mr. Lazarus, take up that stick. It is a sword-cane. I pierced your heart once with the deadliest of thrusts. I will stand here, or anywhere you like, and give you full and free leave to run me through the heart with that needle blade. No one will suspect you. No one will suppose but that I fell by my own hand, unable to endure the humiliation of witnessing the ruin of my house.'

The Jew stooped, picked up the sword-cane,

and drew the weapon. It was fine, keen, and sharply pointed. He looked furtively at Lord Saltcombe, who unfolded his arms, and stood before him motionless, beside a tree.

The Jew's fingers tingled as he held the sword. He turned it, and it flickered in the evening light. In the button-hole by the heart of the Marquess was a red rose. The Jew's blood bounded at the thought that with a thrust he could bring forth something redder there than that rose. But he re-sheathed the blade and shook his head.

'That,' said he, 'would be insufficient. It would be too quickly over. Take back your sword-cane. I have not done with you yet.'

'You have refused me a favour, for which I would have thanked you,' said the Marquess coldly.

'Because I knew it would be a favour,' answered Lazarus venomously, 'therefore I refused it.'

CHAPTER XLVI.

E TENEBRIS LUX.

In the evening the General came into Lord Saltcombe's room. The old man was looking haggard. His grey moustache was not smooth, as usual, but looked like ragged lichen. The spring and strength seemed taken out of him. Lord Saltcombe was pacing the room with arms folded. Lord Ronald put his hand through his nephew's arm and paced the floor with him, without speaking. After several minutes' silence, the General said, 'Your Uncle Edward leaves to-morrow. It is of no use his remaining. Even he can do nothing now. If it had been possible, he would have managed it. We have been deceiving ourselves. Disenchantment has come. Herbert, we have been a happy and an united family. We will stand to our arms, and go down in the old ship together, as men. The Duke must know all, and resolve to sell

the greater part of the estates. Court Royal itself, if need be.'

'Yes,' answered the Marquess, 'I have foreseen this. As you had hopes, I did not press my view. Now you have come round to my opinion. Loddiswell and Alvington must go. Fowelscombe also. Probably Court Royal. We shall never now be able to maintain the place. Better crawl into a smaller house and there die.'

'Perhaps Court Royal might be kept during the Duke's life.'

'No,' answered Lord Saltcombe. 'Let us see the worst over. If we live on here we shall be always tempted to keep up the old state.'

'But remember what Worthivale has said about the Bigbury property. It is worth comparatively little now, but if a company were formed, and a town begun there, it might rival Torquay, and be a golden-egg-laying goose to us, and then the family would flourish again.'

'There is no time for forming a company and building a town. If this had been tried three or four years ago we might have been saved; but now it is over. If a fortune is to be found there, it will not be by us.'

'You are right,' sighed the General.

'Beavis,' said the Marquess, 'calculated on saving a portion of our lands. Let us keep Bigbury—it is possible that some day it may "render," as the French say; but more than half our property must go.'

'And dear old Court Royal,' said the General, with a quivering voice.

'Yes, Court Royal must go, or it will drain away what remains in the vain attempt to live up to it. If we do not, what wretchedness to be among abandoned conservatories, neglected grounds, ruinous outhouses, empty stables!'

'Poor Grace!' sighed Lord Ronald.

'Grace has more courage than you, uncle, soldier though you are. Grace will leave her flowers without a sigh, and the pretty rooms that have been her nest without a tear. You will see nothing but smiles on her face, and hear only words of cheer from her lips.'

'Yes—I suppose so,' said Lord Ronald. 'And yet—she will feel the loss more than any of us.'

'She will have Lucy.'

'Of course, Lucy will never leave her, good, faithful girl.'

'Uncle Ronald, you may as well know everything. My notes of hand have all been

called up. You know how extravagant I was some years ago, when in the army. Well, the sum, compared with the mortgages, is nothing, but for all that, in our present distress, whence is the money to come?'

'Pitiful powers,' cried the General, 'troubles are raining on us as fire and brimstone out of heaven, and what have we done to deserve it?' He stood still, put his hand to his forehead, and thrust his fingers through his white hair. 'My head spins. I cannot think.'

'The first thing to be done,' said Lord Saltcombe, 'is for us to collect our plate and finest pictures, and send them to Christie's, and have them sold.'

The General withdrew his hand from his face, and stood staring blankly at his nephew. Then two clear drops ran down his furrowed cheeks. He hastily took out his handkerchief and blew his nose, to disguise what he was ashamed to have seen.

'Yes, uncle—this must be.'

'The Duke will never consent.'

'Then it must be done without his consent.'

'Herbert! not possible.'

The Marquess said no more; he caught his uncle by the arm, and made him continue with

him the mechanical walk. He did it to enable the old man to overcome or disguise his emotion.

'I never was sanguine,' said Lord Saltcombe. 'I have felt that a storm was gathering over our heads, and that no conductors would divert the flashes into innocuous channels. You and the Archdeacon were more hopeful, so was Worthivale, who, of all others, had best reason to know how matters stood. But when Beavis spoke out so plainly, and Uncle Edward and you refused to accept his opinion, then I knew that the end was near at hand. For myself, I care nothing. Life has little of interest, and is void of ambitions for me. But if it were possible to do anything to soften the blow to Grace and my father, I would do it. There is, however, nothing—only the sad duty of preparing them for the worst, and that I take upon myself. With Grace it will be easy. With the Duke hard, and I may have to call on you to assist me. The mortgagees have a power of sale, and they will exercise it. What will remain to us out of the wreck, I suppose not even Beavis can tell.'

Late in the evening, Worthivale arrived. He was in such a condition of confused misery,

that he could not collect his thoughts sufficiently to advise what should be done. He produced his books, but in his bewildered state of mind could make nothing out of them.

'The disgrace!' moaned the General. 'The humiliation to our proud name.'

'You are a soldier,' said Lord Saltcombe.

'There are some things past the endurance even of a soldier,' answered Lord Ronald.

'Where is the Archdeacon?' asked the steward. 'His opinion would be invaluable now.'

'He has gone to bed,' answered the General. 'He is not feeling well. He is much dispirited by the events of to-day. To-morrow he must return to Sleepy Hollow.'

Then the steward and Lord Ronald began to spin cobwebs—cobwebs that needed but the breath of common sense to blow them away.

Lord Norwich was the brother of the late Duchess. He was getting old and infirm, and he had not been down to visit the Duke lately in Devon. Lord Ronald thought of him. He was wealthy. Why should not he come to the rescue? The Marquess and Grace were his sister's children. Lord Saltcombe reminded them that his son, the Hon. Norfolk Broad, was

not likely to consent; he had spent a great deal on the turf, and would probably run through the property when his father died.

Then Worthivale suggested the taking in hand of the oil-shale works. Oil had not been extracted from them before in sufficient quantities to be remunerative, because the wrong sort of crushers had been employed. The Marquess replied that if the crushers squeezed out gold, then it would be worth while getting them, not otherwise.

'Perhaps the Archdeacon will think of something; he is an eminently practical man,' said the General. 'I dare say he has gone to bed early to consider the matter between the sheets, and he will be ripe with a proposal to-morrow.'

Thus sat the three the greater part of the night; the Marquess was the only one who kept his head clear. At three o'clock the steward and Lord Ronald left, and then he flung himself on the sofa, and fell asleep.

That same evening Lady Grace had been in conference with Lucy in her own bedroom, as she prepared to go to rest. She was in a pretty blue dressing-gown, her hair falling about her shoulders loosely. The lady's maid had been dismissed, and Lucy and she were alone together.

'Tell me truly, Lucy. The meeting has led to no good results?'

'No, dear. I hear that half the amount of two of the mortgages must be paid forthwith, and the rest in two instalments within a twelvemonth. But that is not all. Two more mortgages held by Jews are called in, and so—— Worst of all is the terrible one on Loddiswell.'

'And the money is nowhere forthcoming?'

Lucy shook her head.

'Then what will be done?'

'A great deal of the property will be sold.'

'And Court Royal—must that go?'

'Beavis thinks so. Land sells very badly now.'

'I shall not have to part with you, Lucy?'

'No'—and Lucy nestled into her friend's side—'never, never. Oh, my darling!'

'For myself I do not care. If I cannot have my greenhouses and gardens, no one can deprive me of the green lanes and flowery coombs. I can be happy anywhere with you and papa, and Uncle Ronald and my brother. But I do not know how the others will bear it. Dear papa—I fear it will kill him. Uncle Ronald and Saltcombe are looking miserable.

Did you observe Uncle Edward last night? I never saw his face so drawn and colourless. He was very bent and feeble. I asked him what ailed him. He smiled sadly and said, "Only a general break-up." He takes this to heart, and he is not a strong man like the General. I suppose the dreadful truth must be told papa shortly. I must manage to be present so as to soothe him. He will be fearfully excited. If I can but hold his hands I may be of some good in keeping him cool. What is to be done about Mrs. Probus? Dear, good creature, she is bound up with us and cannot live away from us; and I do not think papa would be happy if he thought she were not in the house; she understands his little fancies. Then old Mr. Rowley, the coachman, with his red face. Oh, Lucy! he has been so comfortable here with us, just driving papa out every afternoon. What will become of him? He is too aged to take another situation, and I hear that gentlemen are putting down their carriages everywhere. Then there is Mr. MacCabe, the head-gardener. He has been so civil. I have been afraid of him sometimes. I feared he would scold when I swept the houses of flowers. But he only smiled, though the loss of the

cherished blossoms went to his heart, I know. And Jonathan—he has always shown himself so eager to oblige. Lucy! what trouble he took over that rockwork for my Alpine garden, and in piling it up he crushed one of his fingers and lost the nail. And Jane, my maid! I give her so much trouble; I am untidy with my things. There, there—I must cry—but it is not for myself; it is only because we shall have to part with all these nice, kind servants, and because papa will be miserable anywhere else, and Uncle Ronald without plenty of room for his lathe, and Saltcombe without his yacht, and his fishing and shooting. He cares for nothing else, and these will be taken from him. He will have Beavis.'

'Beavis, you may be sure, will cling to him to the last.'

'Yes,' said Lady Grace, as she patted her friend's hand, which she held between her own, and looked thoughtfully before her, 'and your father will always be with mine! Oh, what a blessing it is to have dear, faithful friends. Let everything else go. These precious, golden hearts are above all that the world can give.' After a silence she said reverently, 'And they are God's gift, to comfort us.' Both were

affected, and said nothing for several minutes, but Lucy stooped and kissed Lady Grace's hand.

'Lucy,' said the latter after awhile, 'I thought you told me that Mr. Cheek was going to help us.'

'We thought he would, but when it came to the point he drew back, and made ridiculous conditions.'

'Surely he had all but promised, had he not?'

'I cannot say that. My dear father was very sanguine when he returned from town. He told us that he had managed everything beautifully, and that we had no more occasion for anxiety, as our relative, who was a millionaire, would come to the rescue. Dear papa's ducks are all swans, and he is hopeful on the smallest grounds. When Mr. Cheek came here, he did not even go over the estates, he simply came and went again. He did not even attend the meeting.'

'But you say he made some sort of offer.'

Lucy coloured.

'I ought not to have said that. Papa mentioned it to me as a secret. He had not told Beavis, as it would have made Beavis

furious—and he might not have been civil to Charles any more.'

'Of course if you are bound not to tell, I will not press you. Otherwise, I would be glad to know the conditions.'

'They were too outrageous to be mentioned,' said Lucy, partly laughing, partly crying. 'It makes me very angry, and yet disposed to laugh, whenever they recur to me.'

'You very angry! you, Lucy! that would be a new experience to me to see my little friend in a passion; and Beavis furious—who looks so gentle and collected.'

'Enough to make us. If you heard, you would be angry also.'

'Tell me, and prove me.'

'I am ashamed. Promise me not to say a word to Lord Saltcombe, or Lord Ronald, or the Duke—not to anyone.'

'No—I will not repeat what you tell me.'

'Then you shall hear. That stupid old man, Mr. Cheek, saw how agreeable his son made himself at dinner, and being a blunderhead, he supposed that there was more in his attentions to you than ordinary civility. Well! the dull fellow went home, and told papa he would give two hundred thousand towards

clearing the mortgages the day he heard that Charles was accepted by you. Did you ever dream of such audacity? My father had to exercise great self-restraint to keep from knocking the man down. Some minds are not properly balanced.'

The blood rushed through Lady Grace's veins, crimsoning her pure face and neck and bosom. Next moment she was as white as a snowdrop.

'I must not keep you up any later, Lucy,' she said. 'It is time for both of us to go to bed.'

Lucy looked at her friend with surprise. Not an allusion to what had been said passed her lips. Lucy noticed her paleness, and misinterpreted it. 'I have offended you, by telling you of this piece of vulgar presumption. Let the remembrance of it die. I am sorry that I allowed myself to blab the impertinent secret.'

'Not at all,' answered Lady Grace. 'I thank you for telling me. Kiss me, and go to bed. I want to be alone.'

Next morning early, Lady Grace entered her brother's room. He was still asleep on the sofa. The shutters were shut, and the

curtains drawn. The servants had looked in, but had not liked to disturb him.

His sister partially opened one of the shutters, so that a ray of light entered. Then she drew a chair beside the sofa, and sat down by her brother's head.

Presently he woke. Her gentle, pitiful, loving eyes, resting on his worn face, had disturbed him. He looked round and sat up.

'Grace!' he said, and brushed his hands over his brow to collect his senses.

'Yes, dear, I am here.'

'I thought I was visited by an angel.'

She was in a light print morning gown, her face was pale, and in the dimness of the room might well have been thus mistaken.

'Uncle Ronald, Worthivale, and I have been keeping up quite a revel,' he said.

She looked round; there were no glasses on the table, but plenty of papers scribbled over with calculations.

'This looks sadly dissipated,' he said; 'I am sorry you see me and my room in such a condition, Grace.'

'Oh, Herbert! do not think to deceive me. I know well what it means. All hope gone. Everything lost. Is it not so?'

He did not answer.

'Yes, brother, I know the worst, and I am glad that I do. I have not slept at all. I was sure you and the dear uncles were restless through trouble. I have come to you thus early to set your mind at ease. The house need not be sold, the servants need not receive notice. All is not lost. E tenebris lux.'

'I see no light.'

'It is coming.'

'Who will bring it?'

'I dare say I shall.'

'You, dear sister?' said Lord Saltcombe with a laugh. 'Do you remember the little snipe that supposed it could stay up the heavens with its feet, when the thunder rolled, and it thought they were falling? It said, "I, even I, will uphold the skies."'

CHAPTER XLVII.

LEIGH.

The Archdeacon left without giving advice. He had no advice that he could give. He looked ill. When Micah had his idols stolen by thievish men of Dan, he beat his breast, and tore his beard, and cried, 'Ye have taken away my gods which I made, and what have I more?' The belief in his family stability had been the deepest fibre in his soul, and now that conviction was torn up, his mind was in collapse. He had regarded himself as able to assist in every emergency, if not with money, yet with counsel, and now he found himself powerless to avert the impending ruin either with money or with counsel.

The General wrote letters all day, which he tore up and re-wrote. He looked greyer and older than before, and was silent at meals. Lord Saltcombe placed no reliance on his

sister's promise of relief. Whence could it come? He knew of no quarter. She had given him no reason for encouragement. He attributed her hopes to a natural disposition to look for the best. He deferred breaking the news to the Duke, from his habitual procrastination of putting off doing what was unpleasant.

Charles Cheek was still at the Lodge. He could not disobey his father, who had insisted on his remaining there, but he was getting mortally weary of the life. Lady Grace exercised over him the same spell, but the country life, the want of daily variety, the lack of genial companions of his own age, made him wish himself back in Plymouth. He had no resources in himself, and a man without such resources is only happy in a crowd.

'Beavis, old boy,' he said one day, 'I shall give a dinner at the "Duke's Head," and break this frightful monotony. Young Sheepwash and I play at billiards when we do not hunt, and there are one or two other fellows at the club, who are not bad, but stupefied by living out of the world. I feel like a comet getting further and further into outer space. This Kingsbridge is one of life's backwaters where only sticks

assemble. I shall give a dinner. I'll ask the Vicar's son. He is a good fellow enough. His father wants him to go into the Church, because the Duke can dispose of some livings, but he wants to go on the stage, which is absurd; he has no looks and no memory. Can I invite Saltcombe?'

'You can call him, but will he come? I think not; he is much engaged over unpleasant business, which has put him out of tune.'

'Out of tune! I should think so; there is no tune in him at all.'

'You must excuse him. He has heavy anxieties.'

'I know that—about money. That is no excuse for moping. I am always in trouble about money, but it never spoils my pitch. Beavis! you have not heard of my last escapade, and how I got out of it. I lost a hundred pounds on a snail to Captain Finch. I hadn't a hundred pence in my pocket, and he was under orders for India. A girl got me out of my hobble. Little monkey! It fills me with laughter whenever I think of her. Beavis! His Grace the Duke of Kingsbridge could not do better than cross the palm of that little

witch with silver. She'll help him, if help be possible.'

'How did you—or she manage it?'

'She is a queer piece of goods, very respectable. Not a word against her character. I have had many a joke with her now and then. Well! — will you believe me?—she appealed to my father, and threatened breach of promise.'

'Had you given her occasion? Did you like her?'

'Like her! Couldn't help liking her. Such a rogue! Enough to make one laugh all day. You never knew where to have her. Well, my father was in a tearing rage, and went down to Plymouth to see her, and bought her off with a hundred pounds.'

'What has that to do with your debt?'

'Everything. She enclosed the note by next post, with my compliments to Captain Finch, who was surprised and delighted to get the money so expeditiously.'

'She kept none of the money?'

'Not a farthing.'

'Is she well off?'

'Has not a sixpence.'

'Why did she do this?'

'To help me. Because I christened my snail after her. I wish I could go to Plymouth, and see her again to thank her. It seems shabby not to do so, don't it?'

'Your father was quite right in insisting that you should stay here.'

'I cannot stand it much longer, Beavis. The country was not created for me. Glad I wasn't born in prehistoric periods before towns were. Your father is most kind and good to receive me, and the people at the Court are very hospitable, but I get tired of the same faces, same scenes, same subjects of conversation, day after day. I do not know how I should live without the club and the billiard-table.'

'You enjoy your walks with the ladies.'

'I get a certain distance with Lady Grace, but no further.'

'Pray how much further do you want to go? Pretty well for you to be received into such a house with courtesy.'

'Oh, don't you know? My father and I have settled that she is to become Mrs. Charles —I mean, Lady Grace Cheek.'

'What an honour!' exclaimed Beavis sarcastically. 'Pray are the Duke and the lady informed of your intentions?'

'No, I have not had sufficient encouragement.'

'Then let me advise you to refrain from communicating the flattering proposal to either, till you *have* received the requisite encouragement.'

'Of course, of course,' said the unabashed Charles. 'My governor is set on it. I should like it well enough. When I am with her, I am over head and ears; when I am away, I am not so sure that she will suit me.'

'Have done!' exclaimed Beavis. 'This is intolerable.'

'Did you ever hear the story of the North Country collier and his son, who were breeding a dog for fighting? The son went under the table and barked, and the dog flew at him and bit his nose, and held on as a stoat to a rabbit. The lad screamed to his father to call off the dog; but the old fellow said, "Let him bite, lad, let him bite, it'll be the making o' the pup." I think my governor is urging me on in this affair for the same reason. "It'll be the making of the pup," he says.'

Beavis's face flushed. He turned his back and walked away. Charles Cheek ran after him. 'There, old fellow, don't take amiss what I have said; it is only a joke.'

'Then joke on some other subject. Lady Grace Eveleigh is sacred.'

'By all means,' said young Cheek, 'we'll change the topic. Are you going to the Plymouth ball?'

'No, I think not.'

'Nor Lord Saltcombe, nor her ladyship?'

'They never attend.'

'Well!—I am off to the Court. We have planned a walk to-day to Leigh Priory, which they say is pretty; and we shall pick primroses and wood anemones on the way. Will you come?'

'No, I have business.'

'Then there will be only three of us—tricolor. Lady Grace, Cousin Lucy, and myself. Saltcombe has something to detain him.'

Beavis nodded. He was ruffled by what Charles had said, and the swell in his temper would not allay itself at once. Charles walked through the park and joined the ladies.

Leigh is an old priory converted into a farmhouse; it is almost as left by the monks when expelled three hundred years ago, with scarce an alteration save the destruction of the

church. It stands in a wooded valley, with rich green meadows occupying the bottom. A sweet, sheltered nook, basking in the sun—a place in which to dream life away.

The walk was pleasant, the air soft, the sun bright, the buds of the honeysuckle had burst into leaf, an occasional white butterfly flickered in the way. The woods were speckled with starry wind-flowers, and the hedges full of yellow primroses. Here and there the blue periwinkle was spread as a mat. It had escaped originally from the priory garden, as had the snowdrops, and had become wild, like the virtues—simple virtues—of the old monks, which lingered on in the congenial soil of the simple rustic souls of that part of Devon.

'I wonder whether there is truth in Sir Henry Spelman's doctrine that Church property carries with it a curse that consumes the lay impropriators,' said Lady Grace, partly to Lucy, partly to herself. 'Leigh has belonged to the Eveleighs since the dissolution.'

'No, Lady Grace,' answered Charles; 'the cause of decay is generally to be found nearer at hand than in a theft of three centuries.'

'Yes,' she answered, with a sad smile, 'no doubt you are right. We throw back the blame

on our remote forefathers, that we may shut our eyes to our own faults. We Eveleighs have but our own improvidence to look to as the cause of our fall. We have not taken warning in time. We let occasion slip, till occasion came no more.'

'There is no immediate anxiety, I hope,' said the young man.

'Yes, before the year is out, our doom will be sealed, our ruin published to the whole world.'

Lucy looked at her friend with surprise. Hitherto she had not spoken on this subject to a stranger, and now she was courting conversation thereon.

'Let us hope for the best,' said Charles.

'It is of no avail hoping. We have cast out the anchor, and there is no bottom in which it will bite. A fig tree in our garden has been failing for some years. Last autumn I pointed it out to old Jonathan. "Please, my lady," he said, "the fig is going home." This spring the wood is dead, and Jonathan is stubbing up the roots. "He's gone home, as I said," was his remark. Well! the old tree of Eveleigh is also going home, and next year we shall be

stubbed up out of Court Royal, and gone home altogether.'

Young Cheek did not relish a dismal subject. He tried to brighten the conversation by changing the topic.

'Do you ever go to the Plymouth balls? They are select and good.'

'I have not been for some years. At one time, but not since Saltcombe has not cared to attend.'

'Won't you come to the next, at Easter?'

Lady Grace paused, looked down, and said, 'If you wish it.'

Lucy started, glanced at her timidly, and coloured. Even Charles was surprised. He said quickly, 'Wish it! It will crown the ball with perfection. Oh! Lady Grace, how delightful! Then Lucy also will come, and, no doubt, Lord Saltcombe also. That will be charming indeed! How pleased the Plymouth people will be!'

Charles Cheek found a bank of blue borage and pink crane's bill, and some golden celandine —the two former had lingered through the mild winter, untouched by frost. He made two little bouquets, and presented one to each of the ladies. On their way home the conversation re-

verted to the family troubles. Lucy was puzzled. She did not say much; she left the other two to talk. Her mind was engaged wondering at her friend's manner, which seemed changed.

'I wish—oh! how I wish,' said Lady Grace, 'that there were some means by which our ruin might be averted. I would do much—I would do anything that lay in my own power—to save my dear father the sorrow, and to give my brother a chance of beginning life again, uncrushed by the consciousness of the impending Götterdämmerung. The knowledge of what was coming has blighted his life, once so bright with promise.'

Charles looked intently in her face.

'Do you really mean this, Lady Grace?'

'What I say, I mean,' she answered, with a slight tremor in her voice.

Lucy, frightened, looked at her, and saw two fiery spots in her cheeks.

'I have no pride. If it lay with me, I would sacrifice myself, were my sacrifice worth anything to anyone.'

'Lady Grace!'

No more was said. They were in the park. They saw Lord Ronald walking towards them

without his hat, his white hair raised by the wind. He was looking excited.

'I want you, Grace. There is a telegram —from Edward. No, I do not mean that— about your Uncle Edward. A telegram from Glastonbury, from Elizabeth; come in. Saltcombe and I must be off immediately. The carriage is being got ready without delay. We must catch the 7.40 up train. That, however, sticks at Exeter, and we shall have to waste over an hour of precious time on the platform. It cannot be helped, though the Duke urges our telegraphing for a special.'

'What is it?—Oh, uncle!' exclaimed Lady Grace, with fluttering heart, 'tell me the worst —is he——?'

'No, not that,' answered Lord Ronald hastily, but he turned his head aside and wiped his eyes; 'whilst there is life there is hope. A seizure. How severe, the telegram, that is, Elizabeth, does not say. Saltcombe and I are requested to hurry to Sleepy Hollow. The wording is short. Elizabeth might have been fuller. We have not told the Duke all; only that we are wanted, and that—that Edward is unwell. That has made him uneasy. You must go to him, and pacify him, and in an hour

or so show him the telegram. I am afraid, Grace, that this is a serious case. How blows do fall one after another! and Edward the one man of the family on whom one leaned My God! if we lose him, what shall—what shall we do?'

As Charles parted with them at the door, Lady Grace said to him, in a sad, plaintive voice, 'I am sorry I cannot keep my promise. You see the reason. I cannot attend the ball.'

That evening, in her room, Lucy said to her, 'Oh, Grace! what am I to understand? You gave Mr. Cheek such encouragement! After that—he will be daring to ask for your hand.'

'If he does I will give it him.'

CHAPTER XLVIII.

THE FALL OF A PILLAR.

Lord Ronald and the Marquess reached Bridgwater at midnight. There they engaged a fly, and drove across country to Sleepy Hollow. The drive was long. There was no train so late from Highbridge to Glastonbury, consequently they had no choice. When they drew up at the rectory door the hour was early in the morning, and the first streaks of dawn appeared. A light was in an upper window.

Lady Elizabeth appeared. She had expected them, and sat up; she was calm and collected. Lord Edward was no more. He had not recovered from his stroke. The archdeaconry of Wellington, a canonry in Glastonbury, and the rectory of Sleepy Hollow were open for eager applicants.

A bright fire was burning in the study, and the table was laid near it. The cook was up,

and a smell of mutton chops pervaded the house.

'Will you have some hot wine and water, or stout?' asked Lady Elizabeth. 'Dear old man. He seemed to know me. I held his hand, and he pressed it when I spoke to him. There is Worcester sauce, if you like it. He seemed very unlike himself when he returned from Court Royal. I am afraid he over-exerted his brain. I know you all thought him very clever. I always considered him very *good*. There is cold rabbit pie, if you prefer it; but I have no doubt you are chilly, and would like what is hot. At this hour there is no choice —chops and mashed potatoes, or cold meat. There was a worry, moreover, about repairs. Nothing has been done to the house for some time—in fact, we have not had the money to execute necessary repairs. Now we shall have a terrible bill for dilapidations. Edward got a builder to go over the roof with him, because the rain came in. I think he caught a chill, and being below par he succumbed. He was a very good man, and so dear to me!' Lady Elizabeth began to cry. 'I know the chops are tender,' she said, after having wiped her eyes. 'One of our own sheep—we killed on

Monday. I do not know why it is that when we buy mutton we give tenpence to tenpence-halfpenny, and when we sell we get only sixpence. We could not eat all the sheep ourselves, so what we did not want was sold to our workmen and parishioners. Edward let them have it at sixpence. He was so kind—so over-kind. He was easily imposed upon. He did not sufficiently consider himself.' Presently, after another suffusion of tears, 'You must eat. There is ground rice in a shape, and strawberry jam. I know you are unhappy. You loved Edward. So did I; but we are human, and must care for our bodies. Eat, eat, Ronald. Finish that bottle; you shall have another uncorked in a minute. That insufferable curate of ours has mounted the blue ribbon. The last word I heard him murmur was "Ichabod;" that means, "The glory is departed." I am alluding to Edward, not the curate. I thought he wanted to leave me a message. His lips moved, though his eyes were closed, so I leaned over him and said, "Yes, Edward, dear, what is it?" Then he sighed heavily, and pressed my hand, and opened his eyes, and said, "Ichabod!" I believe after that he had not a conscious

moment. Never mind, Ronald, the gravy has not gone through.' This referred to a spill of the juice from the chops on the tablecloth. The General's hand had trembled as he helped himself to the gravy. 'I think you had better not see him to-night. He looks so sweet and peaceful, as if he were twenty years younger. Dear, dear fellow! What shall I do without him? You had better lie down; do go to bed for a few hours. You shall not be disturbed; you have had a long and harassing journey, and you, Ronald, at your time of life, cannot bear these strains like the young. Now, of course, nothing can be done. If he had lived till your arrival it would have been different. Your beds are aired, have no fear; and there are fires in your rooms.'

Lord Ronald and the Marquess remained till after the funeral. The funeral was conducted with some state; Lord Edward was an Archdeacon, Canon of the Cathedral of Glastonbury, and last, but not least, son of a duke. All the principal clergy and gentry of the neighbourhood attended, and the parishioners showed and wept, the women especially. Would the next rector let them have his mutton at sixpence?

The Hon. Cadogan Square, brother of Lady Elizabeth, was there. The Squares were a great legal family, the head of which had been created a peer.

When the Archdeacon's will was read, it was found that he left all his personalty to his wife, five hundred pounds to the Cathedral of Glastonbury, five hundred to the widows and orphans of the diocese, four hundred to the County Hospital, one hundred to the S.P.G., and one hundred to the C.M.S. All the rest of his property was to go to his niece Grace. But when his affairs were looked into, it was further discovered that his real property had been got rid of, sunk in the great Kingsbridge vortex in loan upon loan. Further, it was discovered that dilapidations on the rectory, and the chancel, and some cottages on the glebe, would amount to a thousand pounds, which the widow would be called upon by that horse-leech Queen Anne to pay.

It was further discovered that Lord Edward was several hundred pounds in arrear to the Glastonbury Bank. Also, that the butcher's bill (mutton never below tenpence) for the last eighteen months was unpaid, and amounted to one hundred and forty pounds four shillings

and fivepence three farthings. The grocer's bill for the last two years had been a running account, with running discharges of a few pounds at random; the wine merchant's had not been attempted to be paid except by fresh orders. Lord Ronald was executor. It cost him fifty pounds to prove a will which left nothing to anybody but debts. The Madras Railway bonds had been sold a week before the death of the Archdeacon, and what had become of the money nobody knew. No money was found in the house, except thirteen shillings and sixpence, the proceeds of the sale of part of the sheep to parishioners, at sixpence per pound.

Lord Ronald was obliged to write to the Duke to entreat him to send him some money to cover immediate expenses. This the Duke was fortunately able to do out of the proceeds of the Madras Railway bonds, which had gone to him, and he had given the Archdeacon a note of hand for the amount, which somehow could not be found.

Most fortunately the club accounts, and the church accounts, were in perfect order, as were those of the diocesan societies of which the Archdeacon was treasurer. This was only so

because these were managed by Lady Elizabeth, who kept all the money received in green baize bags, properly labelled, in a locked cupboard, suspended to pegs, like Bluebeard's wives. The curate, however, had not received his salary for the last half-year. The servants had all been paid recently. Lady Elizabeth discharged their wages out of her private purse. Unfortunately for the curate, she did not pay his. As soon as he was able to get away, Lord Ronald returned to Court Royal. He had been very warmly attached to his brother Edward, whom he had reverenced as a pillar of orthodoxy—a pillar he was, like that of Pompey, supporting Nothing—and an ultimate appeal in all matters of difficulty relating to the farms. Lord Ronald was a man with a very gentle, tender heart, and Edward had been associated with his happy boyish days. They had been at school together; they had been companions in the holidays together. In after life, Ronald had always made of his brother Edward his closest friend and confidant and adviser. Consequently the death of the Archdeacon shook the old man profoundly. The troubles and difficulties involved in his executorship bewildered and depressed him.

The Duke was shocked to see how altered he was when he returned to Court Royal. He lost his memory now and then, and seemed dazed, and had to hold his hand to his head to recollect himself. His face was more lined, his hair whiter, it looked thinner; he was less carefully dressed, and his hands shook. His back was bent, and his tread had lost its firmness.

The Duke clasped his brother's hand. 'You have felt the loss of Edward severely, Ronald. So have I. Dear, good, loving soul, full of honour and charity! And what a brain! clear, sound, well balanced. He ought to have been a bishop. Well! the world of this nineteenth century was not worthy of him. There is one great and good man the less, the like of whom will not be met with again.'

After a pause he continued: 'I do not know what we are coming to. The spirit of the age has affected our excellent Worthivale. He demurred to my putting all the servants in mourning. He said the expense would be so great, as all the men must have new black liveries, and the women each a pair of black gowns and a bonnet apiece. I overrode his objections. I have no patience with this

peddling spirit of retrenchment, whether in the affairs of the nation or of this house. It would be a scandal not to go into mourning for Lord Edward. The expense is unavoidable. I presume he has left a handsome sum behind him. I think you told me in your letter that he had left everything, except a few trifles in charity, to Grace. As for Elizabeth, she is provided for by her marriage settlement.'

'I am afraid Grace's chance of getting anything is very small,' said the General; 'and we shall be hard put to, to find money for the charities. I don't quite know what is to be done about the debts—is Elizabeth to pay them? They are heavy. As for the charities, they amount to sixteen hundred pounds, and this we must find; if we do not find it voluntarily, the Dean and Chapter, and the officers of the Widows and Orphans, and Propagation of Heathens, and Church Missionary can force us. It would be a scandal——'

'My dear Ronald, everything shall be paid at once. I shall see Worthivale to-day.'

'Let Saltcombe and me settle that,' said the General. 'Do not concern yourself further in this matter. I do not know whether Saltcombe has spoken to you about the mortgages on

Court Royal and Kingsbridge. They have to be met very speedily. Indeed, time is flying, and the money must be raised. I have been thinking—what do you say, Duke, to the sale of Kingsbridge House? It is of no manner of use to you now!'

'Good Heavens!' The Duke rose in his chair. 'Do I hear you aright? The sale of Kingsbridge House? Your wits are leaving you, Ronald. How can we sell that? We must have a town house. Why, Saltcombe will be marrying—he may be Duke shortly, and then he must spend the season in London. No, not another word of that. The Duke without a town residence! like a foreign yellow-backed book, published without a cover!'

'We cannot make bricks without straw,' murmured the General.

'How, bricks without straw?' asked the Duke testily.

'We are in a condition in which we do not know where to look for money, and yet we have to pay Edward's bequests, some at least of his debts, and the mortgages on the very heart of the property.'

'Worthivale will manage it.'

'Worthivale cannot work miracles. The Alvington mortgages are also called in, and the Loddiswell threatened.'

'Send Saltcombe to me. We will arrange for a fresh mortgage, or get these transferred. They have been transferred already—at least some of them.'

'But more money must be found, and a transfer is not easy in these unsettled times. The property is burdened beyond what it can bear in prosperous times.'

The Duke bit his lips and frowned. 'We have managed very well hitherto, and we shall manage in the future.'

'We have managed in the way of the ostrich—the family crest, and not an inappropriate one—by putting our heads into a bush, and thinking, because we see no danger, that none menaces.'

'Really, Ronald, your anxiety as executor to Edward's will has ruffled your temper.'

'Not a bit. Something must be done, and I do not know what to do, now Edward is gone. I expected Saltcombe to have told you all—he undertook to do so. As he has failed, I must. Emmanuel's mortgages must be paid at once—those of Moses and Levi within three months—

bills have been called in, which we must meet. Here are our debts to Edward, which must be cancelled within a twelvemonth, and the charitable societies satisfied. It will never do for them to say that the poor and the heathen have been cheated of a few pounds by the noble house of Kingsbridge. Then there is the Loddiswell mortgage—and others that are sure to come.'

'These things right themselves,' said the Duke. '"Tout vient à celui qui sait attendre." Let Saltcombe take those troubles off your mind.'

'Saltcombe is prepared to sell.'

'To that I will never consent.'

'If you will not sell voluntarily, the mortgagees will sell from under your feet.'

'Nonsense. Worthivale will satisfy them all without their coming to extremities; besides, if it did come to that—well—rather be robbed than voluntarily alienate the patrimony of our ancestors.'

'Look here, Duke. Let us sell those Rubens at Kingsbridge House. Some of them are scarcely decent—fat nude females and satyrs tumbling amid goats, and peaches, and grapes, and cherubs, and red and blue drapery,

which is everywhere except where it ought to be. One of them, you know, is covered with a curtain. Of what good to us are these pictures? Let them be sold. They are worth a great deal of money, and we should be thankful to be rid of such voluptuous nightmares.'

'They were presented to the Field-Marshal by the grateful City of Antwerp. They are heirlooms. They have a history. They have been engraved. We cannot part with them.'

'There is a quantity of old plate here—I should say tons of it, which is never used. Why should not that be sold?'

'For the best possible reason, that each piece has a history. Some were presented for services rendered, others are works of high art, some came to us through distinguished marriages. No, the plate cannot be parted with.'

'Then the books. There are perches of volumes in the library no one ever looks into, some, doubtless, valuable; possibly some unique. Let us have down a London bookseller to value them, and if need be, purchase them. Which of us cares for old books now?'

'They are all bound and impressed with our arms on the covers, or have our bookplates

inside. I cannot endure the thought of them finding their way into the libraries of common Dicks and Harries. No—the books must not be sold.'

'There is the family jewelry. There are magnificent sets of diamonds and other stones, never worn. Let them be disposed of.'

'Not on any account. Saltcombe may marry, and his wife will need our jewelry. You would not have a Duchess of Kingsbridge without her diamonds?'

'I give it up,' said the General distractedly, with his hand to his head.

'My dear Ronald,' said the Duke, 'if we are to go down, which I will not for one moment admit, let us sink like Rienzi and his sister in the last scene of the opera, amid falling pillars of Church and State, of the moral and social order. I see on all sides threatenings of the dissolution of the bases of society. It may be that we, in England, will go through throes like those of the Revolution in France. It looks like it. All that we honour and hold sacred is menaced. There is no security anywhere. In the general social upheaval and constitutional overthrow, we may be crushed, but do not let us contribute to our own fall.'

'I want to avert it,' exclaimed the General.

'Listen to me. I must trouble you not to interrupt me. There is one thing of which, if we be true to ourselves, we can never be despoiled—our dignity. Let us maintain that. Let us combat the powers of evil—I mean the democracy——'

'But this is not a case of democracy at all, but of debt,' interrupted the General.

'You are again snapping the thread of my argument,' said the Duke offended; 'and now I don't know where I was, it has shrunk out of reach like a ruptured tendon. Do not let us cast away what is ours, as sops to Cerberus, to facilitate an Avernian descent.'

'What about the charitable bequests? The honour of the family is at stake.'

'Where the honour of the family is menaced, it must be maintained at all cost. "L'honneur avant la vie." But I can see no dignity in the lizard, which when pursued slips joint after joint of his tail, and is content if he lives, a maimed and despicable trunk.'

Lord Ronald was trifling with a bronze lizard paper-weight on the table as the Duke spoke, and his Grace's eyes were on it. 'There is something to me unspeakably contemptible in

attempting to conciliate the masses by dropping privilege after privilege, and selling estate after estate to satisfy Jewish money-lenders—it is all the same.' He paused, still looking at the lizard. 'I do not see how it is possible that Edward can have left so little. He had a good income from several quarters, and Elizabeth was not penniless.'

'He has left nothing but debts.'

'What sort of debts?'

'Butcher's bill, grocer, shoemaker, clerical tailor, fruiterer—I cannot tell you all. There is quite a commotion among the shopkeepers of Glastonbury; they think they will be done out of their money.'

The Duke reddened. 'Done out of their money! Nonsense, Ronald! With me to fall back on! Write to them at once. I make myself solely responsible for all my brother's debts. Every man shall be paid, and paid promptly.'

Lord Ronald still stood playing with the bronze lizard.

'Well!' said the Duke, looking up, 'that settles everything, I trust.'

'But whence is the money to come?'

'My dear fellow, I cannot attend to such

trifles. Worthivale will manage that. Let him have the figures.'

'And the charities?'

'All shall be paid—to the fraction of a penny.'

'But how?'

'That is not your affair. It can be done, of course. I pledge myself to pay.'

The General sighed. 'Oh, Edward! Edward!' he moaned, as he walked away more dispirited than when he entered the room. 'Only your genius could now disperse the cloud of difficulties! And you are gone. One pillar is fallen, and the whole building will go to pieces.'

CHAPTER XLIX.

AN APRIL FOOL.

A GREAT change had come over Lazarus. Whether it dated from the sprouting of the moustache, or from the conference at Court Royal, and the final imposition of terms on the great family, could not be determined by Joanna with nicety. She thought that the change began with the moustache and ripened after the latter event. Lazarus was elate. Old Cheek had retired without interference, and now that his heart was lifted up, he was more liberal than when he consented to an occasional bloater. Indeed this liberal tendency had swelled into large proportions. He had not shrunk from saddle of mutton with onion sauce, nor from fillet of veal with stuffing, nor from sirloin of beef and Yorkshire pudding—only at pork he had drawn a line, for he was strict in his Hebraic prejudices.

'Have pig's puddings if you like, Joanna. Don't let my inclinations bar your way—yet, perhaps, such is the delicacy of your feelings, you don't like to eat and see me fast.' He spoke thickly, making strange efforts with his mouth to get out the words.

'What is the matter with you, Mr. Lazarus? Your speech is queer, and your appearance changed——' Joanna stopped short, and stared. Lazarus opened his mouth. He had provided himself with a double set of artificial teeth.

'I thought I'd electrify you,' he said. 'Yes—I've had my jaw taken in hand by an artist—a dentist. Cost me a lot of money, Joanna, the charge was outrageous—a fancy price as for an object of vertu. But, so long as it pleases you, I don't care.'

'I wish,' said Joanna, 'that you'd be more particular about your hair, Mr. Lazarus. You make your pillow as black as if you used your head for a flue brush.'

Lazarus looked down.

'You used to have grey hair.'

'Not grey,' said the Jew; 'just a speckle here and there—like wood anemones in a grove.'

'But now your hair is glossy black. Don't

use your head again on the chimney. If you object to a sweep I will use a holly bush.'

'It is not that,' he said humbly.

'Then what is it?'

'Dye,' he replied, with deepened colour—a coppery blush. 'Dye that cost me five shillings. I've gone through a course of Zylobalsamum and Eau des Fées. There, Joanna, if I blacken my pillowcase I am sorry. Henceforth I'll tie a black silk handkerchief round my head when I retire to bed.'

'What was that concern I found on the chair in your room this morning?'

'My stays,' whispered the Jew.

'Stays!' echoed Joanna.

'Call it corset,' said Lazarus. 'It sounds more aristocratic. My figure wants it.'

'What next?' asked Joanna contemptuously. 'Are you coming out in knickerbockers and a Norfolk blouse?'

'I don't like irony,' said the Jew; 'it hurts my feelings, which are ticklish as the soles of my feet. Joanna! what say you to a picnic? A jaunt to Prince's Town, on the moors in this brilliant spring weather, and a look at the convicts—so as to combine moral edification with pleasure?'

'I should like it.'

'You shall have it. Express a wish, and I fly to fulfil it. I have even forestalled your wishes. I've invited the old lady from the ham and sausage shop to join us as a sort of chaperon, you understand.'

'When is this to be?'

'On Sunday, when no business is doing. A carriage and pair, in style. It will cost a lot, too, but what of that, if it give Joanna pleasure, and the mountain air bring roses to her cheeks, and the sight of the prisoners inspire her heart with virtue.'

'Why have you invited Mrs. Thresher?'

'As a chaperon. But,' with a chuckle, 'if it would suit you better, Joanna, to come alone with me, I'm—as I always am and must be—agreeable. The weight will be less for the horses. The ham and sausage woman weighs ten stone before her dinner. Not that we shall be charged less for going without her—but we shall have to feed her out of our pockets. There is that to be considered. If I order a dinner at six shillings, and there are only ourselves to eat it, we shall consume three-shillings' worth each, whereas if Mrs. Thresher comes we shall be limited to two. That has to

be considered. However, it is for you to decide. I'll regulate my appetite by your decision.'

As Joanna said nothing, he added, 'There is another point worth weighing. If the ham and sausage lady comes, I must sit with my back to the horses; that makes me bilious, and spoils my relish of the victuals. Where you pay you expect to relish. It wouldn't be etiquette to set a lady rearwards to the horses, would it? But no—I'll manage. We'll have a waggonette!'

'There's one thing I should like above every other,' said Joanna; 'that is, to go to the ball.'

'The ball! But I can't be there.'

'That will not affect my pleasure. You have spoiled my fun more than once. I was to have gone to a grand dance at Court Royal, but could not, because of your affairs. Now the spring ball is about to come off, and I should dearly love to be there.'

Lazarus rubbed his head, and looked at the palm of his hand, upon which the dye had come off.

'Joanna,' he said, 'you don't consider. These balls are very select; only ladies of the county families, and the wives and daughters of officers. No second-rate parties there——'

'I don't want to go to any second-rate affair. The best, or none at all.'

'But I don't see my way to manage it. You'd want a chaperon, and the old lady from the ham and sausage shop is not quite, as the French put it, cream of the cream.'

'I remember that you once told Mr. Charles Cheek that you could send me to any ball you had a mind to, and no lady dare refuse you.'

'I was romancing,' said the Jew: 'I'm by nature an Oriental, and prone to soar into poetry.'

'I will go,' said Joanna decisively.

'I can't find the way to do it,' answered Lazarus.

'Very well; go to the moors with Mrs. Thresher, eat your three-shillingsworth. I will remain behind.'

'Oh, no, no, Joanna! I've set my heart on this excursion.'

'And I have set mine on the ball.'

'I'll see about it,' muttered the Jew.

'I shall not give a thought to the moors. You need have no dread of sitting with your back to the horses. You can lounge in the back seat with Mrs. Thresher.'

'Joanna! I would not go without you. My

body would be on Dartmoor, but my soul would remain at the Barbican. If you could see inside my heart,' he said in a pathetic tone, 'you'd behold your own self curled up there—like a maggot in a hazel-nut. But there, I'm launching into poetry again.'

Joanna vouchsafed no remark. He sat and watched her, but she showed no symptoms of relenting.

'I'm not now what I once was,' he went on. 'Then I had an object before me for which I toiled and stinted. Now that object is attained, and I need stint and toil no more. Hitherto life has been to both of us a time of privation, now it shall become a holiday. I will deny you nothing on which your heart is set. I have money in abundance, and as you have helped me to make it, you must help me to spend it. If you want rings, take them from my drawer. Chains and bracelets are at your disposal. Select what gowns you like, they are all yours.'

'Go to bed,' said Joanna; 'the whisky has got into your old head.'

After that she would not speak to him. He made many attempts to draw her into conversation, but all failed. When he was about to

retire to rest, he stood in the doorway, the picture of distress, and sighed, and said in a soft tone, 'Good-night, Joanna.'

She poked the kitchen fire savagely, and said nothing.

'Won't you say "good-night" to me who've been so kind to you?'

Still no answer.

'I'll think about the ball, Joanna.'

Still obdurate.

'You—you shall go to the ball, Joanna.'

'Good-night, Mr. Lazarus.'

The change in the Jew's manner caused the girl uneasiness. She was shrewd enough to see what it meant. He had fallen in love with her after a peculiar fashion. For a long time he had used her as a drudge, as a mere slave, without compunction what he laid upon her and how hard he treated her. By degrees he came to realise the value of her services, and he began to ask himself what would become of him were they withdrawn. Where could he find a substitute? She had grown into his ways, to understand his requirements, almost to think his thoughts. She had been educated in the business and comprehended it thoroughly in all its parts and turns. Then, when he had

come to appreciate her worth to him, Charles Cheek appeared on the stage, admiring her, hanging about the house, and threatening, as the Jew feared, to carry her off. Alarmed at the prospect of losing her, his eyes opened to the fact that she was grown to be a woman, and a beautiful woman. He grew jealous of the visits of young Cheek, and jealousy, bred in self-interest, awoke a sort of monkey-love in the old man. His wife was dead and he was free.

Joanna did not, perhaps, read all that passed in his mind, but she read enough to be uncomfortable in his presence, and to repel his advances with decision.

She used his infatuation as far as served her purposes, but she kept him well at bay. Several times when they were together, she noticed that he was working himself up to a declaration of his sentiments. The sure sign of this was his helping himself repeatedly to the spirit-bottle. When he did this the girl left the kitchen, and did not return till his courage had evaporated.

Formerly the Jew had drunk nothing but water, only occasionally mixed with whisky. Of late he had enlarged his doses, not of water,

but of whisky. He sometimes pressed her to take hot spirits and water, to sip some from his glass, on the pretext that she had taken a chill, but she steadily, even rudely, refused.

Lazarus was disagreeable enough in his earlier bearish mood, he was worse in his later loving mood; and, in spite of the increased comfort in the house, Joanna would gladly have returned to the former state of affairs, to be freed from his ungainly and irksome amiabilities.

Joanna was not happy. She had not seen Charles Cheek for some time, nor heard more of him than a report brought by Lazarus, that he had been to his father and that the old man had forbidden his return to Plymouth, the scene of so many follies.

The day fixed for the excursion to Prince's Town broke brilliantly.

Dartmoor is a high barren region, rising from two to three thousand feet above the sea, towering into granite peaks, broken by brawling torrents. In the heart of this desolate region, and in the most desolate portion, in a boggy basin devoid of picturesqueness, stands the convict prison of Prince's Town, above the line where corn will ripen and deciduous trees will

grow; often enveloped in vapour, exposed to every raging blast from the ocean.

To pass from the warm, steamy atmosphere of Plymouth to the cold and bracing air of Prince's Town, is almost a leap from the hot into the frozen zone. The drive was delightful. Joanna and Mrs. Thresher sat facing the horses, and the latter talked of the drop in the price of pork and the quality of imported bacon, during the greater part of the journey. The Jew occupied the position that disagreed with him. Joanna entreated him to change seats with her, but his gallantry was proof against her solicitations. He cast yellow, malevolent glances at Mrs. Thresher, who made no such offer, which, had it been made, he would have accepted. He maintained his place, sitting sideways, and his face became momentarily more sallow. He wore a straw nautical hat, with a blue riband about it with fluttering ends, and in golden characters on the front, an anchor and the name 'Nausicaa.' His black vest was very open, exhibiting a starched white front set with coral studs, and a black tie à la Byron slipped through a cornelian ring. Over his waistcoat dangled a massive golden chain, and his fingers were covered with rings.

As the unfortunate man became really unwell, the ladies insisted on his mounting the box. 'But then,' said he gallantly, 'I am turning my back on the finest view,' and he bowed to Joanna and raised his cap, exposing a very discoloured lining.

Joanna enjoyed the drive, especially that part of it when Lazarus was not opposite her, getting yellow in face and grey in lip.

She did not talk to Mrs. Thresher; she was not interested in American bacon; she was engaged in looking about her, at the views, the hedges, the rocks, the rushing stream that danced and feathered over the granite boulders. The hedges were starred with primroses. Here and there they were white, and here and there pink. The larks were singing and twinkling high aloft, the busy rooks were cawing and flashing in the sunlight, looking sometimes white. From the beech-groves came the liquid coo of the doves, and the gush of the throstle's song, and the fluting of blackbirds. Nature teemed with music, poetry, and the exuberance of life. Only one thing lacked, thought the girl, to make the day perfect: Charles Cheek should have been there with his joyous humour and lively prattle. At length they reached

Prince's Town, and ordered dinner at the inn. Whilst the meal was in preparation, the holiday makers wandered about the prison, and watched the warders and the convicts.

'This is very improving,' said Lazarus. 'It screws up our morals, like the tuning of fiddles. You see, Joanna, the miserable end of men who allow themselves to be found out.'

After dinner, Joanna slipped away, to be alone in the wilderness, and inhale with long draughts the sparkling air that pours into the lungs like atmospheric champagne. She climbed a height, and ensconced herself among the piles of granite, away from the cold wind, in the glow of the glorious sun. To the south lay Plymouth harbour and the glittering sea. Fold on fold of blue hill stretching away for miles to the rugged peaks of the Cornish moors lay to her right.

As she sat in her nook, believing herself alone, she was disturbed by a head with a sailor hat protruding itself from behind a rock. In another moment, Lazarus was before her. He threw himself in the short grass at her feet, picked a rush, and nibbled at the end.

'Joanna,' he said, 'why did you run away? Why did you leave me with old Thresher?

What do I care for old Thresher? I brought Thresher to-day as gooseberry picker. In the upper walks of life, to which we are going to belong, gooseberry pickers are the thing. Young people must have them as incumbrances when out junketing. I've left old Thresher examining some pigs fed by the warders off the scraps left by the convicts. Did you mark how the old lady ate? I did. It was a race between us; especially over the roly-poly pudding. She didn't want to have the doughy end without the jam, and I was determined she should. A roly-poly has but two ends, not three, so two must have ends, and only one can enjoy the middle. I was resolved that you should have the best part and that Thresher and I should have the ends. I cared for your interests above my own, you'll allow that, Joanna. I took one end, and Thresher pulled a mow when I gave her the other. Did you see it? But you had the middle, oozing out with whortleberry jam; and that shows, if demonstration were needed' (he lowered his voice), 'how I regard you. I wouldn't have done that in the old days, would I?'

'No, sir!'

'And let me assure you of this, Joanna, the

round globe does not contain another woman for whom I would do it now.' He took off his hat, and exposed his forehead scored with a black ring. 'I hope you see, Joanna, what a change has taken place in my feelings towards you. You may have noticed in me the wakings of tenderness of late. Ah, Joanna! do me a favour! You saved my house from fire, my property from burglars, my throat from their murderous knife. Save now my heart from despair. I offer you my hand; let us walk together down the flowery path of life, with the roses blushing in our way and the doves cooing over our heads, and with plenty to eat and drink on the journey. Spend, Joanna, what money you like, eat what dainties you desire, dress in what clothes you fancy, and picnic when and where you will. Oh, Joanna, "O, that we two were maying," as the song goes, together through life without a Thresher at our side as a sharer of our pudding! Cease to consider me as your master, and accept me as your husband.'

Then Joanna burst into a ringing laugh.

'Too late, Mr. Lazarus, too late!—not permissible after twelve o'clock.'

'What do you mean?'

'This is the first of April, and you are trying to make of me an April fool.'

'I am serious. I protest, most serious.'

'Then,' said she, 'it is yourself that you have succeeded in converting into a most egregious April fool.'

CHAPTER L.

TO THE RESCUE.

Mr. Charles Cheek was supposed to know nothing of the difficulties of the family, till Lady Grace spoke to him so plainly on the subject. He had, however, heard something from the steward, whose mouth could not keep silence, and his father had told him plainly what he knew. From Mr. Worthivale he heard of the fresh trouble caused by the death of the Archdeacon. Nothing further had passed between him and Lady Grace. She was friendly, and he remained fascinated. There it stopped.

Lord Saltcombe had at last been roused to take a decided step. The General told him of the Duke's objection to the sale of anything, and of the necessity under which they lay of at once finding money. The honour of the house was at stake, and the Marquess visited his father, and was closeted with him for an hour.

When he came out, he went at once to the General.

'The Duke will allow me to act independently; but he desires to be spared particulars. My hands are set free to raise money, but he is not to be consulted how it is to be raised, nor told how it was done when the money is raised. As we want immediate cash, let us have the plate and jewelry overhauled, and get rid of what is not necessary. There is that confounded set of diamonds I bought for Dulcina Rigsby. They cost twelve hundred, and I dare say will fetch two-thirds. As for the family jewelry—I shall never marry, and so the race will expire with me. No Duchess of Kingsbridge will need them. My mother was the last. I have the key to the safe where they are kept.'

'Let us begin at once, and pack what is not in immediate requisition.'

Lord Saltcombe rang the bell for the butler, and ordered the plate chests to be taken into the state drawing-room, not now likely to be used again; also the cases brought there that would be likely to serve for the packing of valuables. Mr. Blomfield obeyed without a muscle of his face working, and soon the grand

room was filled with boxes and piles of silver plate, old salvers engraved with arms, supporters, and coronet; punch bowls, centre-pieces, goblets, christening and caudle cups, urns, kettles, tea and coffee pots, ewers, candelabra—a mass of metal, much of beautiful workmanship.

'That,' said the General, 'is the great silver salver presented to the Field-Marshal by the City of Ghent, of which he was in possession at the time. He was not Duke then; you see the fulsome inscription in Latin. This must be melted up. It will never do to have it sold as it is, to proclaim the straits to which the Eveleighs have been reduced.'

The butler and the footman packed the plate in the green cloth-lined cases. In former times it had been transported with the Duke to town and back to the country. Consequently the proper conveniences for the reception and removal were ready.

'Is not this beautiful?' said the General, pointing to a silver teapot on a lampstand of exquisite workmanship. On one side were represented Chinese picking tea leaves, on the other Chinese ladies sipping the beverage made from them. The groups were enclosed in the

most delicate shell and flower work. With it went a cream and a milk jug, and a silver canister, all of equal beauty of workmanship. 'This set belonged to George the Second,' said the General; 'he gave it to the Duchess Lavinia on her marriage.'

'Here is my christening cup, out of which I used to drink as a child, and there are the marks of my teeth on it,' said Lord Saltcombe, with forced gaiety.

'This cream bowl ought to be valuable, remarked Lord Ronald. 'I never saw anything like the delicacy of the work, the festoons of roses and jessamine, with butterflies perched on them. Fortunately the arms are not on it. I suspect it is unique.'

Tray after tray was filled with silver forks and spoons, soup-ladles, great gravy spoons, enough to furnish a Lord Mayor's banquet.

When all the silver was packed that had to be sent away, and the rest, that was to be kept, was laid on the floor, the porcelain was collected.

'Fetch everything from my room, Robert,' said the Marquess; then with a laugh, 'I have been disenchanted with some of my prizes, and doubt the value of the rest. I dare swear I

have been egregiously taken in. Anyhow, there can be no questioning the value of these Sèvres vases presented by Charles X., and there is abundance of precious Oriental china all over the house.'

The room was now filled with splendid bowls, great standing vases for pot-pourri, old Dresden figures, Chelsea in abundance, majolica dishes, Cape di Monte white groups, superb specimens of Palissy, services of Crown Derby, Swansea, and Wedgwood, of the most choice and exquisite descriptions. Chimney-piece, plate chests, the floor, were encumbered with them.

The Marquess himself went to the jewel chest, and brought in as much as he could carry. He laid on the table a tray of crimson velvet on which sparkled a tiara, necklace, stomacher, and earrings of diamonds.

'My mother wore these at the coronation of Her Majesty,' said Lord Saltcombe; 'she lost one of the diamonds out of the brooch, and never wore the set again. The place of the missing stone was never filled up; perhaps that was the first symptom of difficulty in finding money.'

A beautiful chain of white pearls with pendants of black pearls attracted his notice.

'How well this would have become Grace,' he said. Then he brought in more, a complete parure of amethysts. Then rings—diamond, topaz, amethyst and diamond, ruby. These splendid ornaments seemed in the cold daylight to have lost their sparkle, and to be sensible of the general sorrow, decay, and humiliation.

'The pictures must come down,' said Lord Saltcombe. 'The Rubens at Kingsbridge House can be disposed of to the National Gallery, which is short of examples of that master.'

'Will the nation care to spend thousands on fleshy Dutchwomen? I doubt it.'

'Some of the paintings in this room are valuable,' said the Marquess. 'Let us have them down, and they can be measured for their cases. That Murillo was bought by the first Duke off the easel of the painter. These Gerard Dows are more interesting than beautiful. There is an Adoration by Porbus, with Philip II. and Alva as two of the Wise Men. Here is a Turner purchased by my father, undescribed by Mr. Ruskin.'

'The Reynolds' portraits—what of them?'

'We will not part with family pictures if

we can help it. Let them remain suspended. There is a large Morland with its clump of dark trees, and a pretty Gainsborough, a fine example and worth a large sum. These must certainly come down.'

Lord Saltcombe and the General were standing in the middle of the room, which was strewn with treasures. Most of the silver was packed, only that left out which was reserved for use. The china was about, some being packed in hay; the jewels in their trays were spread out on the tables; the pictures were unhung—when—the door opened, and Lady Grace entered with Mr. Charles Cheek and Lucy.

Lady Grace saw in a moment what was being done, and coloured and stood still. Lucy also understood the situation, and was seized with a fit of trembling. The occasion of their entry was this—Charles had said, in the course of conversation, that he had never seen the state rooms, whereupon Lady Grace, unaware of what was taking place, had volunteered to show him through them.

'Packing for removal to town,' said the General. 'Rather late in the season, but better late than never.'

Charles Cheek was not deceived. He drew

back. He was moved. It was sad to see the break-up of a noble family, to stand, so to speak, beside its deathbed. He withdrew from the room at once, and halted on the staircase outside the door, and with agitation in his voice and face and manner, he said, 'Lady Grace! will you give me a right to fly to your assistance, and prevent this humiliation?'

'Yes,' she answered with calmness, 'I will.'

That night Charles Cheek hastened to town by express that reached Paddington at 4 A.M.

He was at his father's house before the old man was up, and he awaited him in the breakfast-room. Charles was in a condition of feverish excitement, in spite of his cold night-journey. A servant had taken him to a room where he had washed and changed his clothes.

The old man came in, spruce as ever, in his black cloth frock coat, a white shirt-front, stretching his arms, and then rubbing his hands.

'Governor!' exclaimed Charles, 'I have been waiting to see you these two hours and a half, burning with impatience. I have something of importance to communicate.'

'Ugh! Want money?'

'No—that is—not for myself.'

'Ugh! Still—want it.'

'That is not my primary reason for coming here.'

The old man puffed himself out and stood by the fire, winking and rubbing his hands, and glowering at his son.

'I have just returned from Court Royal. I have spoken to Lady Grace, and she has consented——'

The father shook his head doubtfully.

'It is a fact, governor, I give you my word. She gave me the promise in the presence of Lucy Worthivale. Some time before she all but promised, but yesterday she was explicit.'

The old man rubbed his hands vigorously, thrust his arms forward, flashing his cuffs, then hiding them again.

'By Ginger!' he said, 'what a chap you are!'

'Do you mistrust me?'

'Mistrust? No. I didn't think you equal to it, though. You are a fine fellow, that you are. The girl has sense. Ginger! she'll make a Lord Charlie of you.'

'Hardly,' laughed Charles; 'the wife does not ennoble the husband.'

'Don't she? She should. We'll change

the law. Make it a political question. Don't tell me she'll flatten down into Mrs. Charles Cheek!'

'Not quite that. But never mind. We have not got to that point. I want you, father, to act promptly. I have come by night express, and must return to-day.'

'What do you mean to do?'

'You will remember what you undertook. The family are in immediate want of money. If you are satisfied with what I have done, give me leave to stop the sale of their valuables.'

'What! got to that pass! A galloping consumption. When I undertake a thing, I do it; I'll take up the mortgages to the tune I scored, but I won't tear them up till the marriage is accomplished.'

Charles explained what the immediate need was.

'Very well,' said the old man; 'give me a bill of sale on the furniture and plate and pictures, and I'll advance the money. I'm not such a fool as to give without security.'

That was the utmost Charles could obtain from his father.

'There is no knowing,' said the old man. 'The young woman may mean right enough,

but the aristocratical relations may interfere, and blow themselves out with pride, and refuse consent; then—what about my money? As for the mortgages, I'll see to them at once. Those of Emmanuel shall be taken up immediately, and when the registers are signed, I'll tear them to shreds. As for ready money, I'll advance something on the stock-in-trade, but only if I have a bill on them to enable me to seize in default of fulfilment of conditions.'

Charles was obliged to be content with this. He returned the same day to Kingsbridge.

'You've had a long journey,' said Mr. Worthivale. 'I was amazed when told you had gone to town. Nothing the matter with your father, I hope?'

'Nothing at all,' answered the young man. Then, after looking inquiringly at the steward, 'I say, do you recall a certain conversation you had with my father?'

'Bless my soul! he overflowed with conversation, and every word was precious. To what do you particularly allude?'

Mr. Worthivale knew very well what was meant, but he was reluctant to have this topic retouched. Lucy had told him nothing. With

his ideas, the suggestion of old Cheek had seemed to him a sort of blasphemy.

'Well,' said Charles Cheek, 'it has come about after all. Lady Grace has passed her word to me.'

'Stuff and nonsense.'

'It is a fact. I went up to town last night to communicate it to my father. If you are in immediate need of cash he will advance it on the security of the contents of Court Royal and Kingsbridge House.'

Mr. Worthivale coloured.

'Lady Grace! Impossible.' The steward was stupefied. 'Why, you are nothing, literally nothing, one of the people; and your father is in'—with a shudder—'trade!'

'I assure you it is so. Ask Lucy. She was present.'

'You misunderstood her. It is impossible. Sheer impossible. Your head has been turned. I ought never to have introduced you.'

'I repeat; she has consented.'

'But—the Duke—and the Marquess—and Lord Ronald, what will they say?'

'They have not been asked.'

'You had better not ask them. As you

value your happiness and my regard—don't. For Heaven's sake, don't.'

'Mr. Worthivale, excuse me, but you seem to think that the advantage is all on my side. Yesterday Lord Saltcombe and Lord Ronald were packing the valuables to be sent to London for sale. There is therefore desperate immediate need of money. I come offering to relieve them from their difficulties—at least from those most urgent. The mortgages to the amount of two hundred thousand pounds will be taken up by my father, and on our marriage he will give them over. The pictures may be rehung, the plate unpacked, the jewels and china replaced. I do not know what the sum is in immediate requisition, but my father is ready to advance it—so long as it is under ten thousand—on receipt of the consent of the Duke and the Marquess to the contents of these two houses, of which you will furnish a list, being the security for the sum.'

'Not a word of this to them! Lord Saltcombe will never forgive me. My goodness! What presumption there is in the rising generation! To them nothing is sacred! I suppose, sir, you are a blazing Radical!'

'I have no political opinions, having nothing to gain or lose.'

'Leave this matter in my hands,' said the steward. 'I will see the Duke. I will manage about the bill. I must rush off now, and stop the packing of the pictures and the carriage of the plate. I was to have gone to town with all the things, and done my best with them.'

'You are welcome to arrange with the Duke about the bill, but I cannot have you interfere between me and Lady Grace.'

'I—I! I would not dream of mentioning it. You have been deluded.'

'By whom? By Lady Grace?'

'Heaven forbid. She is incapable of falsehood. By your own inordinate vanity, which has deluded you into hearing things that were never said and seeing things that were never done. It is impossible. As soon make me believe the common people here when they tell me they have seen the sun dance on Easter morning.'

Worthivale said no more. He was convinced that the young man had dreamed. It mattered little. The immediate advantage of the dream was great. The precious collections of Court Royal were saved for a time. Time

was what he wanted. In time the Marquess would marry and shake old Cheek and all other Old Men of the Mountain off his shoulders, who weighed him down and plucked the golden fruit and left him starving. In time Bigbury Bay would become a rival to Torquay, and make the Eveleighs as Torquay had made the Palks. In time the slate quarries would rout all other slates out of the market. In time the shale would distil petroleum. What mattered it, if for a while the young man were left dancing in darkness with bandaged eyes. He would some day see his folly, and blush at his temerity.

Meantime—Providence was interfering for the salvation of the Eveleighs.

CHAPTER LI.

THE FLYING FISH.

JOANNA carried her point. She went to the ball. She had set her heart upon it. No dissuasion would turn her from her purpose, no difficulty discourage her. Go she would, and go she did.

The Easter ball was qualified by selectness. If it was nothing else, it was select. On this it prided itself. The most rigid censorship was exercised over the admissions by the committee. No one without blood, or—this was a concession—money was allowed. The committee sat at a table, and the names were passed from one to another. It was like running the gauntlet. Only those that came out unscathed between the lines were allowed to appear. The nobility and the county families patronised and attended it. The Earl and Countess of Mount Batten, Lord and Lady Laira, Sir John and Lady St.

Austell, patronised the ball, and gave it the stamp of selectness. The generals and their ladies, the admirals and their parties, all the J.P.'s and the J.P. fowl attended, and added their insistence to its selectness. The ball was so select that it hedged itself round with the most exclusive and arbitrary restrictions. It drew a line here, and a line there. It put its foot down at this point, and at that, for no reason possible of explanation to anyone without the bump of selection on his skull. The ball was so select that no lady with the soil of trade on her fingers could hold them out for a ticket. It was so select that, of the Church, only the wives and daughters of rectors might enter; the females whose orbit is in a Peel district and revolve about vicars and curates, were shut out. It was so select that the family of the wine-merchant were as rigidly excluded as the family of the pastry-cook who united with the wine-merchant to furnish the supper.

On the Cornish coast folk say, when the wind wails at the windows, that the ghosts of drowned sailors are without, flattening their spiritual noses against the panes, dabbing their dripping palms against the glass, weeping

because excluded in wind and rain from the warmth and light within. Outside the great assembly-room, the spirits of unnumbered women wept and wrung their hands. The ball was too select for them. Let them dance on their own low levels, and not aspire to circle in the system of the social planets.

This Easter ball was quite a different affair from the October and the hunt balls, when the room was occupied by cliques, and the cliques danced together, ignoring the cliques below them, and went to supper and ate in cliques, and talked in cliques, and flirted in cliques, and clacked in cliques. This ball was emphatically a one-clique ball.

Yet, into this most select of balls Joanna thrust herself. This was how it was done.

Mr. Lazarus had lent money to the Hon. Mrs. Yellowleaf, and he sent her a note to say that unless the loan were repaid by a certain date, he would County Court her.

Mrs. Yellowleaf came down to his private office in great trepidation. She had not the money; she was in daily expectation of a remittance from an aunt. She entreated Mr. Lazarus to delay. Mr. Lazarus was inexorable.

He wanted his money. He had heavy bills to meet by a certain day. Mrs. Yellowleaf had promised repeatedly to repay the loan, and had not done so. His patience was exhausted. He was a poor man, he had put himself to great inconvenience to find her the money; if she could not or would not pay, he must cast her into court, and if that failed, he would put in an execution. Mrs. Yellowleaf turned green at the threat, and nearly fainted.

'I cannot find the money,' she said—'I simply cannot. My husband, as you know, is with the China squadron. My remittances have not arrived. My aunt is very kind, but she is out of humour with me just now, and I dare not press for more.'

When he had reduced her to a condition of abject despair, then only did he offer relief. Relief could be bought—but on hard terms. She must take under her protection to the ball a young lady who particularly desired to attend.

The Hon. Mrs. Yellowleaf was aghast. This was a sheer impossibility. She *could* not, she *would* not run such a risk. The tears came into her eyes. She knew nothing of the 'person,' neither her name, nor character, nor ante-

cedents. The ball was most select. She might get into serious social trouble by taking there an individual unqualified to associate with good society. There were so many denied admission whose claims were urgent.

'Very well,' said Lazarus rising. 'Then prepare to see your name in the West of England papers. You shall have your summons to-morrow.'

'Who is she?' asked Mrs. Yellowleaf, after a pause for consideration.

Lazarus explained that she was a Miss Rosevere, an heiress, an orphan, of irreproachable character. 'No relations in Plymouth, none that I know of in Devon or Cornwall.'

'What is she like?' asked Mrs. Yellowleaf doubtfully.

'Like!—there won't be one in the room will surpass her in looks, I can assure you.'

'She is not—not an Israelite?' She thought 'Jewess' might sound rude. so she said 'Israelite.'

'You need not fear. Not a bit. Cornish—comes from the dark lot down the coast by Veryan and Goran; dark hair, dark eyes, olive skin. She'll be the belle of the ball and the richest girl there too.'

The Hon. Mrs. Yellowleaf drew a sigh of relief.

'Very well, Mr. Lazarus, if you will not press for payment, I will take the young lady. I trust she dresses well.'

'Dress!—she'll dress as well as the best, I promise you.'

So it was settled. Mrs. Yellowleaf was uneasy about her undertaking, but unable to evade it.

On the evening of the ball Joanna was seen into a cab by Mr. Lazarus. 'Ah, lack-a-day!' said he, as he shut the door on her, 'I can't go with you, but it ain't possible. The sight of me in the assembly-room would be too much for the nerves of some folks there.'

The Hon. Mrs. Yellowleaf's carriage led the way, followed by Joanna's cab. The lady had just seen her in the hall. She was sorry that she had no place in her own carriage to offer Miss Rosevere, as her daughters and son went with her; if Miss Rosevere would follow in her fly, she would await her in the entrance or disrobing room.

Accordingly she saw Joanna when she put off her cloak and shawl. She looked scrutinisingly at her, and was struck by her beauty. She

turned sharply round, with motherly apprehension, and caught an admiring expression in her son's face. 'I wonder whether she be really an heiress!' thought Mrs. Yellowleaf. 'Possibly enough that, being a stranger, she may not have known anyone to whom to apply.'

She thereupon softened towards the girl, and spoke to her amiably. Joanna had much less dialect than one of her status might be supposed to be infected with, for she had not associated with other girls at the Barbican. She had grown up alone, talking only to Lazarus, who had no provincial brogue. His English was passable. Joanna's was also passable, though not the language of perfect culture. Mrs. Yellowleaf knew, the moment she opened her mouth, that she had not the bringing up of a lady. A very few words sufficed. 'Ah!' she thought, 'some mining captain's daughter, who made a fortune in tin, and left it to her. She has money, but not breed. Still, she has money. After all, nowadays, money is everything.' That was to be her explanation, if asked about Joanna. 'My dear, an acquaintance whom I could not refuse asked me to be civil to the young lady. People are very inconsiderate. They ask you to carry parcels for them, and

stand chaperon to all sorts and conditions of girls. It ought not to be done. As for this Miss Rosevere, I know nothing about her, except that *elle est une bonne partie*, worth, I am told, but I do not know, three thousand a year.' That is what she would say. What she thought was, 'Three thousand will obscure bad intonation and grammatical slips.'

As she went upstairs she wondered whether it would be well to allow John-Conolly, her son, to take a fancy to the girl. 'Not,' she considered, 'till I know exactly her value. Her father's will can be seen in the Probate Court for a shilling.'

She touched one of her daughters. 'My dear Lettice,' she whispered, 'if Mr. Charles Cheek should ask you to dance, be civil. It is true that his antecedents leave much to be desired, but he has, and will have, money.'

Mr. Cheek was there, much disappointed at not being able to appear in company with Lady Grace and the Marquess. Still, though debarred their companionship, Charles was not disposed to forego the gratification. He was becoming very tired of the uniformity of life in the country, and depressed by the cloud of troubles which hung over Court Royal. At first he did

not observe Joanna. But on going up to speak to the Hon. Mrs. Yellowleaf, and engage Miss Lettice for a dance, his eye met that of Joanna. A look of incredulity, then of blank amazement, then of amused delight, swept across his face. 'Halloo!'—he checked himself when 'Joe' was on his lips, and substituted 'Miss Rosevere.'

'You know Miss Rosevere?' asked Mrs. Yellowleaf in trepidation. She had noticed the change of expression in his face.

'Oh yes! old acquaintances,' answered Charles, with his eyes still on Joanna, full of wonder and question.

'Where have you met?' asked Mrs. Yellowleaf.

'At—at—the Duke of Kingsbridge's—Court Royal,' answered Charles, dashing at the first name that occurred to him.

'How is the Duke?' asked Joanna, with composure. 'And dear old Lord Ronald? So grieved to see that the Archdeacon is dead. The blow must have been severe to his Grace. The brothers were so attached.'

'Oh, well—that is, not very well. I am just come from Court Royal.'

'Indeed,' said Joanna. 'And sweet Lady Grace, and Lucy Worthivale?'

'They are well,' answered Charles, puzzled beyond description. How did the girl know anything about the Eveleighs?

'You were not at the Christmas ball,' said Joanna, 'when the Rigsbys were staying at the Court, and everyone supposed Dulcina would become Marchioness. Yonder she is—with her coffee-coloured father. How tastelessly she does dress! I must go over and speak to her. Come with me, Mr. Cheek.'

'Joe!' he whispered, as he escorted her across the room, 'of all wonders this is the most wonderful!'

'Am I out of my element—the flying fish among gulls?'

'Not a bit.'

'How do you do, Miss Rigsby?' said Joanna, extending her hand. 'I am afraid you do not recollect me; but we met at Court Royal during the winter.'

Dulcina looked at her uncertainly. She could not remember the face; but was that wonderful? She had met so many strangers at the Court. She was glad, however, to be recognised, and to have someone to speak to, as she knew few ladies in Plymouth.

The Hon. Mrs. Yellowleaf nudged her son.

'John-Conolly,' she said, 'you see the plain-faced, gorgeously-dressed girl that Miss Rosevere is speaking to. She is an undoubted heiress. Go and secure her hand for as many dances as you can. Be very civil to her, and bear in mind that you must either work or marry money.'

'Mother, I'd a thousand times rather dance with that charming girl you brought here.'

'Dance with both. Try to be struck with both, and let them perceive it; but be cautious with the Rosevere. *Il me faut prendre des renseignements.*'

'Who is that very striking young lady yonder?' asked Mrs. Fothergill, wife of a country squire.

'That,' answered Mrs. Yellowleaf, 'is a Cornish heiress. Between me, you, and the post—money made in mines. However, the Kingsbridge family have taken her up, and put the *cachet* on her. Lady Grace Eveleigh and the Marquess are unable to be here, owing to the death of their uncle, the Archdeacon. As they could not come with a party, I was asked to bring Miss Rosevere. Very rich and handsome, though somewhat wanting in polish.'

'Joe,' said Charles Cheek, when no one

was by to hear, 'this is roaring fun. You are the most audacious little rogue I ever came across. You thrust yourself in here—anywhere that you have a mind. And then—you extort a hundred pounds from my father! Oh, Joe, I have never thanked you for that. It was good of you. But conceive how staggered I was when my father ran up alongside without showing signals, and poured a broadside into me because I had got myself entangled with a little pawn. Put me down for a score of dances, Joe. I had rather dance with you than with any other girl, and talk of something different from the weather and the primroses.'

But this might not be. Joanna had no lack of partners. The rumour spread that she was a Cornish heiress—taken up by the Kingsbridge family. There was no question as to her beauty, or to her ease of manner and movement. Ease of manner was given by complete self-assurance. Ease of movement by the fact that she had lived all her life in slippers.

'Cheek,' said an officer, 'surely that is the girl I saw in the stage-box the night of that frightful accident. You went up and talked to her. We asked you then who she was.'

'Yes, and I told you.'

'You told us she was an heiress, and were disinclined to introduce us. It is mean of a man like you, with such prospects, to keep the heiresses to yourself.'

'You are too dangerous a rival,' answered Charles laughing. 'But it is not true; I leave the field clear about Miss Rigsby.'

'What an uncommonly good-looking girl that is,' said one mother, against the wall, to another standard medlar. 'Not quite happy about her extraction, I understand.'

'Rather odd in speech, I hear,' answered the latter. 'But the Kingsbridge people have taken her up on account of her money, and there is a rumour of the Marquess of Saltcombe becoming engaged to her, now he is off with Miss Rigsby. They could not come because they are in mourning, so they asked Mrs. Yellowleaf to be responsible for her.'

'Dear me! I had no idea Mrs. Yellowleaf was intimate with the Eveleighs. I hear queer reports about the Kingsbridge family—very shaky, I understand.'

'Ah, bah! Every planet has its occultations, and comes out of the shadow as bright as before. *You* never have known what it is to be in financial eclipse, I suppose.'

Joanna was dancing with Charles Cheek.

'You do not know how you are perplexing the old ladies,' he said. 'As for the men, they are infatuated. Take care, Joe, that you leave no joint in your armour open for an arrow to enter. Some of the markswomen will be spanning their bows at you before the night wears to day.'

'What a pity you were not at the Christmas ball at Court Royal,' said Joanna, without noticing his warning. 'I mean, of course, the first ball; the second was only for the tenants and servants. The room—the grand ball-room, you know it—was superb with its painted groups in panel, of the time of Louis XIV. It belonged to the older house, and was incorporated in the new mansion built by the late Duke. And the crystal lustres twinkling with rainbow-tinted light! And the drawing-room—do you know the pictures there? The Gainsborough, and the Murillo; the Sèvres vases given by Charles X.?'

'Joe!' exclaimed Charles, 'you will drive me mad. Are you a witch? Have you the gift of second sight? How come you to know anything about the rooms and people at Court Royal?'

'Never mind. I will not tell you.'

'I am cross with you for one thing, Joe. You might have been sure I would have been here to-night, and it would have been graceful to wear the Roman pearls I gave you. They were only Roman pearls, true, but the chain was pretty.'

'I could not. I had given it away.'

'Oh, Joe! how could you do that?'

'I gave it to the best of women.'

'Who can that be? I know one whom I think that.'

'It is the same. She has it—Lady Grace Eveleigh.'

Charles Cheek stood still in the midst of the dance. 'You gave my necklace to her!—Impossible.'

'Ask her next time you meet. She will tell you it is true. Now tell me something. How come you to know Court Royal?'

'That is easily answered. Mr. Worthivale, the steward, is my cousin. I have been staying with him, in exile—because of you. My father has sent me there into banishment.'

'That is why I have not seen you in Plymouth?'

'Yes—and—I will confide something more to you that affects me greatly. You will hear

it talked about shortly. I am going to marry Lady Grace Eveleigh.'

Joanna stood still, and stared at him. 'Impossible!' she said.

'It is true—I assure you it is true.'

'I will dance no more,' said Joanna abruptly. 'Take me to a chair.'

'Remember you owe me the next waltz.'

'I will not dance with you again.'

She remained seated during several dances; the gentlemen came round her, entreating her to honour them, but she refused all. She said she was tired.

At first Joanna was occupied with her own thoughts, and paid no attention to what passed about her, but she presently woke to the sense that she had seated herself in a wasp's nest. The ladies around her were faded beauties or mothers, and resented the arrival of a stranger on their preserves who carried off the beaux from themselves or from their daughters.

By slow degrees she was roused to give attention to the conversation that went on about her, and to become aware that words were flying around barbed and poisoned.

'Who is that child in pink yonder?' asked a handsome lady on the verge of thirty, who

must at one time have been a queen of beauty. 'Can you tell me, Mrs. Delany? It is cruel to send children who cannot be over seventeen, and ought to be in bed and sleeping.'

The lady addressed sat on the other side of Joanna. Joanna looked sharply round; she was curious to see Mrs. Delany, in whose service she was supposed to have been so many years. That lady shrugged her shoulders contemptuously, and, returning Joanna's stare, answered the faded beauty.

'My dear, how can I tell? The ball has ceased to be select. What the committee can be about is more than I can answer, admitting persons of whom one knows nothing.'

'Is that worse,' asked Joanna innocently, 'than giving characters to servants you have never seen? There was much talk of a lady having done this when I was at Court Royal.'

Mrs. Delany turned crimson, and sat back.

'I have known quite nameless, unknown persons give themselves out as friends of people of rank,' said a lady on the other side of Mrs. Delany, 'who turned out on inquiry to have been governesses or companions in the family.'

'I have heard,' said Joanna, 'of gentlemen so absolutely nameless nothings that they have

had to borrow their wives' names and get knighted in them.'

The lady put up her fan instantly.

'What bad form it is, Lady Hawkins,' said the ex-queen, 'in unmarried girls wearing jewelry!' and her eyes rested on a necklet round Joanna's throat.

'I beg your pardon,' said Joanna. 'Is Mrs. Gathercole addressing me? I ask because I see you wearing a brooch I coveted the other day, but I was too late—it was sold to Captain Gathercole.'

She felt—she did not see—a shiver of suppressed laughter about her. The fading beauty turned deadly white, rose and left the place.

'What a pity it is,' said the lady who took the vacated chair, addressing Mrs. Delany across Joanna, 'that the possession of money should be deemed a sufficient qualification for admission! There are persons in this room who have no other right to be here.'

'But there are persons admitted who have not even money qualifications,' said Joanna. 'Persons glad to get a guinea from the Jews for a gown of old gold and black lace.'

The lady sprang up as if she had been

stung, and Mrs. Delany burst out laughing; the old gold with black lace was well known.

'As for Cornish mines in which some people have their money,' remarked another, who had not spoken before, 'I am well assured that such property is as unsatisfactory as castles in Spain.'

'Or,' observed Joanna, speaking aloud but addressing no one, 'or as husbands at sea, always at sea, but never seen, like the Flying Dutchman.'

In the midst of the silence that ensued, Charles Cheek came up and offered her his arm. She rose and took it. Her colour was heightened and her eyes sparkled.

'Good heavens, Joe! What have you been doing? You have set all the women against you!'

'The flying fish can snap as well as the gulls,' she replied.

CHAPTER LII.

ON THE PIER.

When Mrs. Yellowleaf was ready to leave, she intimated her intention somewhat curtly to Joanna. Charles Cheek at once flew to assist her to her cab and muffle her in wraps. Mrs. Yellowleaf's carriage was first packed and driven off. Then Charles said, 'Are you by yourself? That must not be. Allow me to accompany you to the Barbican, and see you safely home.' He waited for no reply, but stepped into the carriage beside Joanna.

'Oh, Joe!' he said, 'you have made mortal enemies. Your *mots* have been passed round the room, and those whom you stabbed will never forgive you. How did you know anything about Sir William Hawkins taking his wife's name, and being knighted in it, because he was—well, without a name of his own? And that affair of Captain Gathercole and Miss

Fanshawe, and Mrs. Duncombe — whose husband never turns up—and the rest?'

'I know everything about people in Plymouth—it is part of the business.'

'You will never, never be forgiven.'

'I am not likely to meet these people again.'

'Did you enjoy yourself?'

'For a while—and then I did not care for the ball any more.'

'Why not?'

She did not answer.

The cab was dismissed at the Barbican, and Charles paid the driver.

'Joe,' said he, 'come on to the pier, and let us look at the water rippling in the moon. It will be dawn directly.'

She hesitated a moment, and then said, 'Very well; I want to tell you something.'

He gave her his arm. 'You are not likely to catch cold, I hope?'

She shook her head.

'The more I see of you,' said he, 'the more I wonder at you. You are a person of infinite resource. Joe! tell me you are not cross with me for what I confided to you.'

'Not a bit,' she answered. 'I told you to

aim at position, and you have followed my advice.'

'It was my father's doing.'

'Do you not love and admire her? You must—you must do that! Why, I do! I love her still.'

'Of course I admire Lady Grace. Never can fail to do that. I love her also—well—in about the same fashion as a Catholic loves and adores the Virgin.'

'Are you satisfied with what you have done?'

'I will empty my whole heart before you,' he said. 'I know you are capable of advising me—of encouraging me.' He sighed. 'I daren't say all I think!'

She laughed. 'In the same breath hot and cold. You will and you won't. You can and you can't.'

'Do not sneer at me. I am in a difficulty. I assure you I have been mortally weary of the life at Court Royal Lodge. Old Worthivale, the steward, is a sort of cousin of mine, and infinitely tedious. Beavis, his son, is too occupied with the family failure to give me much of his company, and he has not that in him to afford me entertainment. I have hunted twice

a week, but now the hunting is over. Five days a week I am consumed with *ennui*. I go to the club in Kingsbridge, and try to find some fellows with whom to play billiards, but sometimes no one is there: the day is fine, and they want to boat; or the day is wet, and they want to read novels at home over the fire. Then they all talk shop—local shop. They seem to me like a cage of animals bred in confinement, who can only think and feel interest and talk of the world within the bars of their cage. If I had not passed my word to my father, I would have run long ago.'

'Is there no attraction, then?'

'I allow there is Lady Grace. She is beautiful, sweet as an angel. She is kind to me, but never affectionate, and I cannot conceive it possible that we shall ever stand nearer to each other than we do at present. Of course we can be married, but that will not fuse my soul into hers and hers into mine, because we have so little in common. We have different specific gravities. When we are together, and I see her gentle face and hear her soft tones I am under a charm which holds me—at a distance. The charm draws and repels at once. Can you understand? I feel that I love her,

but I feel also that she is unapproachable by such as me. If we do get married, we shall be like a two-volumed book, of which the volumes belong to different editions, and are in different type and of different sizes. We shall belong to each other so far that we shall bear the same label, but she will belong to an *édition de luxe*, and I to the cheap and popular issue.'

'Then why did you propose to Lady Grace? Was it merely to obtain position?'

'No, Joe. My father wished it, urged it, badgered me into it. I liked her, I cannot do other than like her. I pity the family. And then—the Worthivales put me on my metal.'

'How so?'

'They scouted the possibility of my winning her. They seemed to regard me as the dirt of the street aspiring to the sun.'

'Do you think you will not be happy with her?'

'I shall go to church with her and never get out of it again. We shall carry the church with its solemnity and oppressiveness and mustiness into our married life. Our tendencies are diverse as those of a balloon and a diving-bell. We shall have as little intellectual sympathy as John Bright and a "Blackwood," which he was

cutting and trying to read. I belong too much to Bohemia, with the city of Prague as my Jerusalem.'

'If that be so, you are in a false position, and must leave it.'

'I cannot,' answered Charles. 'I cannot do so without cruelty. The family are in straits for money. My father has undertaken to pay off the most pressing mortgages and debts. If the marriage does not come off they will be utterly ruined. Do you know I stopped the sale of their pictures, plate, and jewels? All were being packed to send to London; when I got Lady Grace's promise, I galloped to town on the back of an engine, and got my father to advance the necessary money to stop the sale.'

'Does Lady Grace marry you to save her family?'

'I do not know that she is aware of the compact—but—I suppose she must,' he added humbly. 'She never would take me for myself. The brazen pot and the earthen pot are going to float down the stream together, and we shall have to keep our distance for fear of jars.'

Joanna stood on the pier looking out at the promontory of Mount Batten that seemed to

landlock the harbour. The moon was behind the citadel, steeping the Barbican in night, but the water beyond flashed like quicksilver. She folded her arms under her wraps. Charles tried to read her face, but there was no moonlight on it, and the pier lantern was high above, casting a shadow over her.

'Well, Joe, what do you think?'

'Give me time to consider.'

'I am in this position. If I marry her I shall gain that which you have bidden me aim for, and shall have pleased my father, and saved a worthy family from utter destruction. On the other hand, I shall have sacrificed my independence and cut myself off from the rollicking life that suits me. I shall live in a social strait-waistcoat, and I hate restraint. If I do not go through with the matter I shall make the governor furious; he will never forgive me, and the Duke will go to pieces. Is it honourable and fair for me to back out?'

'No, Mr. Cheek, it is not. Go on,' said Joanna, and sighed.

'I thought you would say so,' observed Charles, also with a sigh, 'but I hoped that your advice would be contrary.'

Then neither spoke for some time. Far

away, behind the hills to the east, the sky was beginning to whiten, but the moon shone so brightly that the tokens of coming day were hardly perceptible.

'We are old friends, are we not?' said Charles sadly.

'Yes—we have known each other since last fifth of November.'

'What a time it seems since then! So much has happened that it is an age to me.'

'Also to me. To me it has been the change from childhood to womanhood, from outward hardship to inward suffering. It cannot be other. Mr. Cheek, we must part. We shall see each other no more.'

'No more!' he echoed. 'Nonsense, I intend to see a great deal of you when allowed to return from exile.'

She shook her head. 'It cannot be.'

'Why not? The Golden Balls is here, and the door open. If I choose to enter with a pair of silver spoons, who is to thrust me out? And if there be no customers in the shop, I suppose I may perch on the counter and enjoy a pleasant chat?'

'No,' she said, 'never again. You told me yourself you were going into social stays. You

are changing your nationality, and about to forget Bohemia.'

'Not yet—no—no! I will enjoy my freedom for a while longer.'

'There is a further reason why I cannot allow it,' she said, and looked before her into the dark water, and beyond it to the glittering sheet of wavering silver. 'I am going to be married.'

'Married! you—Joanna!'

Both stood silent, so silent that nothing was audible but the lapping of the water on the steps of the pier.

'Joanna! I will not believe it. To whom?'

'To Lazarus.'

'Joanna!' There was mingled pain and horror in his tone. She said nothing more, but shivered, though wrapped up well in shawls.

'Come hither,' said Charles almost roughly. 'The first time I saw you, I took you to the light to see your face; and the face I then saw has haunted me ever since. Come here, and let me see your face again. I will see if this be cursed earnest or cruel joke.' He drew her within the radiance of the lamp, and turned the head up. She offered no resistance, but looked firmly at him.

There was no mischief lurking in the dimples at the corners of her mouth, no devilry in her eyes. There were dark lines in her face, gloom in her deep great irises, and set determination in her mouth. She felt that the hand that raised her chin to expose her face was trembling and cold. She was glad when he withdrew it, and her face relapsed into shadow. Perhaps she could not have maintained composure much longer under the scrutiny of his eyes.

'I cannot help myself,' she said in a low voice. 'Judge for yourself if I can. Lazarus has resolved that I shall be his wife. I suppose he is afraid of losing me unless he ties me fast. But what can I do? I have no home, no father. I must wait here till my mother returns. I am number 617. I have been 617 in the shop for seven years. Everything else in the shop has changed, but I have remained. Old goods have gone, and new come in, and the same numbers have represented scores of new objects; only 617 has not changed. Some of the articles have been redeemed, but I have not. Some have lapsed, and I am lapsing. Some have been sold, and I am about to be sold. I remain uncancelled in the books, 617, and nothing can cancel me but the return of my mother

or the expiration of my time. Here I must remain. I am not free. I dare not go. What would my mother say were I to run away? She would be ashamed of her child. What if she were to return, and I were gone—should we ever meet again? Lazarus would never tell her where I was if I had left him—even if he knew, just out of spite to her and me. But it is not that, not that,' she said sadly; 'I dare say you can't understand me, but I feel it here.' She touched her heart. 'It would not be right. I cannot go. You have a Christian conscience because you have been brought up as a Christian. I have a pawnbroking conscience because I have been brought up as a pawnbroker. There are different denominations and different consciences belonging to them. What is right to one is wrong to another. All that I know of right and wrong Lazarus has taught me, or it has grown up unsown, like the grass and weeds in my back yard, that shoot between the stones. It stands written in fire on my heart that I cannot go without the duplicate, and that if Lazarus chooses to make me his wife I cannot help myself. If I go against that writing, all light will go black before my eyes, and I shall be blind.'

'Oh, Joe! Joe! it must not be!' Charles spoke in pain.

'How can I escape?'

'The thought is too terrible; that hateful, loathsome Jew—and you—you!' He caught her arm, and drew it through his and paced the pier. 'It maddens me; I must work off my fever. You do not mean it. You say it out of frolic to torture me, and when you have driven me to desperation, you will burst forth into one of your fresh laughs. Is it not so?'

'No, it is true.'

'But you cannot like him.'

'I respect him as a master. I hate him as a lover.'

'Joe, it must not be. Run away. Go into service; if you want money, I will give you all I have; sell the very clothes off my back to support you. Trust me, try me; I will work the flesh off my fingers to save you from so hateful a fate. I am in earnest; you will not believe me. You have known me only as an idler and a good-for-naught. I have had no one to care for, nothing to work for. Promise me, promise me you will not——' His voice gave way. He could not finish his sentence.

'My friend,' she said quietly, 'I cannot run

away. I have told you so already. It would be wrong according to my pawnbroking conscience. I cannot receive your money, that would be wrong according to my womanly conscience. I cannot remain with Lazarus, except as his wife, now that he has asked me to be that. That also, according to my womanly conscience, would be wrong. If he had not asked me, I could have remained, and I would have remained, as hitherto, working, starving, bargaining, begging, lying for him. As that cannot be, there remains a single door of escape.'

'Then escape by it,' said Charles.

'You wish it?' she asked quietly, looking him full in the face.

'Certainly, anything rather than—— But what is it?'

She shook her head and drew a long deep sigh.

'Let me go!' she said, for he was still holding her wrist.

'No, tell me.'

She suddenly extricated herself from his grasp.

The white light was spreading in the eastern sky, and the moon, struck with paralysis, failed and became dim.

'Joe,' he said, and covered his eyes. 'Now only, when about to lose you, do I begin to realise what you are to me.'

He looked up, looked around, she was gone.

CHAPTER LIII.

ANOTHER DISAPPOINTMENT.

CHARLES CHEEK returned to Court Royal Lodge. He had lost his brightness. He was troubled about himself and about Joanna. He had become engaged to Lady Grace without being really in love with her. He liked a free and easy life, and the formalities of Court Royal were intolerable to him. He liked variety, and one day at the Park was like another. He was naturally of a joyous and careless spirit, and he was forced by circumstances to think, and think seriously; hating responsibilities, he had entangled himself in a net of them, and saw no way of escape out of them.

The Duke said one day to his daughter, that it was well to encourage the young man to be at the Court, for he heard he was very well off, and it was high time for Lucy to get married.

'He is gentlemanly and agreeable. He

knows his place. We must not be selfish and keep Lucy to ourselves.'

Lady Grace turned her face aside. It did not occur to the Duke as possible that young Cheek looked higher.

'Should this come about, as I hope it will,' said the old man, 'it will be our duty and pleasure to make a handsome provision for Lucy. She has been devoted to you and to our whole house. We must not deal shabbily in the matter. I will speak to Worthivale about it.'

'For pity's sake, papa, not a word,' entreated his daughter, laying her delicate hands on his arm, whilst a little colour fluttered about her face, like the flush of the cloud when touched by the setting sun.

'As you will,' said the Duke; 'I only suggested it; but in these delicate matters a stranger's hand must not meddle.'

Lucy watched her friend closely. She knew that Lady Grace had no dislike to Charles; she knew also that she did not love him. Lucy was able to read her heart like an open letter and she saw that Grace was sacrificing herself solely for the sake of her father and brother.

Did she realise the greatness of the sacrifice? Was the preservation of the estates worth it?

Lucy was glad of an opportunity to be with her brother one day to talk to him on the subject.

Beavis was looking careworn and sad. He knew that Lady Grace was engaged to Charles Cheek. The money advanced on the security of the furniture and plate had assured him of that. He took Lucy's arm. They were walking in the garden under a brick wall, against which oranges and limes were trained. The scent of orange flowers was on the air. During a frost mats were placed over these trees, otherwise they were exposed, and flowered and fruited in the open air. Lucy plucked a twig of orange blossom, and, holding it between her fingers lightly, looked into the flower. 'Beavis,' she said, 'I shall be picking these blossoms some time this year for the adornment of Grace. I had as soon be putting them about her in her coffin. You also would be happier that it were so.'

She did not look at her brother.

Though they were comparatively seldom together, she and her brother thought alike,

felt alike, loved alike, as twins, each with the same disinterested and transparent love.

'No, Lucy,' answered Beavis, 'it is well as it is. The family must be saved, and no salvation is possible without sacrifice. The sacrifice the gods demand is always of the best and purest. They refused that of Saltcombe; it was great, but not great enough. Iphigenia must suffer that the wind may swell the slack sails again.'

'But the Duke will never consent.'

'He must consent. He will do so under protest to save the family; that is always the first consideration with him. He would cheerfully sacrifice himself, if called to do so, in such a cause.'

'Would it not be best that the sacrifice should be made by him—that the bulk of the property should be sold rather than that dear Grace herself should be forced into this most unsuitable connection?'

'I do not think she will be unhappy. Charles is amiable; he is not brilliant, and she will lead him.'

'I am sure she does not love him.'

'I am not sure that he loves her. He is

struck with her, that is all. He cannot ask of her what he does not give himself.'

'I hope,' said Lucy warmly, 'with all my heart I do hope that it will never come off.'

'I see no other means of escape open. It must take place.'

Lucy was not happy. She took an opportunity of speaking alone to Charles Cheek.

'Mr. Cheek, you must excuse my temerity. I have been brought up with Lady Grace from childhood, and I care for her as my own soul. I do, do hope you love her.'

'Of course I do. But now,' said the young man gravely, 'now that I have you all to myself, Cousin Lucy, you must be candid with me. I want particularly to know what are Lady Grace's feelings towards me.'

'She regards you very highly.'

'If the property could be saved without the incumbrance of Charles Cheek, I suppose she would be well content?'

'That is not a fair question to ask, and I will not answer it.'

'Cousin Lucy,' he said, 'I am like Jacob at the foot of the ladder whose top reaches into heaven, and Lady Grace is an angel standing on

it, high, very high up. She beckons me to ascend, and I want her to come down to me. Till one yields there can be no *rapprochement.* Which is it to be?'

'How can you ask? For her to descend is inconceivable. You must go up.'

He shook his head. 'I do not care for such altitudes. The air is too thin, the light too strong, and it is deadly cold. I like the warmth of earth and its somewhat crass atmosphere.'

'You would drag her down!'

'Am I sacrilegious? I think her very perfect, quite angelic, but insufficiently human.'

'What do you mean by human—that which is gross? Lady Grace can never become that. Human she is in the best sense. She shows you what human nature may become, not what it usually is.'

'Quite so—*natura,* about-to-become. I like the present; there is unrest in a future participle. Cousin Lucy, to every substance, humanity not excepted, there are three conditions possible: the solid, the fluid, and the gaseous. I am in the first, she is in the last. I am not even, and have no desire to be, in the transition stage. She must condense and descend, or I must evaporate, and *that* I won't do.'

'Go higher, always higher!' said Lucy eagerly.

'The desire to do so is not in me. It is a strain to me to keep awing in this region of high culture. I am like Icarus. My waxen pinions are melting, and I shall go down suddenly.'

'Surely you do not object to culture?'

'Not at all. I like culture as it affects creature comforts. I would not go back a hundred years and be bereft of my bath, my daily paper, lucifer matches, and having my hair brushed by machinery. Culture is excellent till it meddles with the inner man. When it begins to scrape, and reduce, and polish natural proclivities and robust individualities, why then, Lucy, I fancy it not.'

'You would like a luxurious savagery?'

'No, not that. Outer culture will relax and soften the inner brute. You begin by stifling nature and then mummifying it magnificently. Your highly crystallised culture resembles a Rupert's drop. Do you know it? It is a frozen tear of glass, so hard that you cannot break it with a hammer, and yet so fragile that it will crumble into dust between your fingers if you snip the hair-like end. Refine as you will, there is always a vulnerable point in your civilisation,

and when that is touched the whole collapses. I like your culture well enough : a little of it is a wondrous thing ; a great deal is overpowering. I have known a whole family suffocated by the breaking of a jar of otto of roses. You are passing human nature through retorts and sublimating it to an essence. There will be a reaction. The reaction is begun. It was the same in old Rome. Their culture was carried to an extremity, and the barbarian burst over it and trampled it out. Now your high refinement of mind and manner and spirit has reached its limit, and the great mass of barbarous, vulgar life beneath is lifting itself up, to smite you down and destroy you.'

'The northern barbarians came down on Rome because the old Roman civilisation was selfish. The northern races were full of heroic virtues, self-restraint, submission to authority, and religion. Are these qualities to be found in the coming barbarians?'

'Oh dear, no,' said Charles. 'What we are coming to is the revolt against these very virtues which characterise your Christian aristocratic culture. What is coming is the emancipation of individualism, which has been distorted and suppressed by self-restraint, submission, and

religion. You, brought up under the old system, are parts of a whole, and think and act and breathe and move as portions of the social machine. You are bound with responsibilities, hedged about with duties. You cannot do what you like, you have to consider everyone else. You have obligations to every child in the school and sick woman on her bed. You have to dress according to your station; attend church to set an example. Where is the I Myself in this? A poor bound lion in a net. The coming change is the bursting of the lion out of the net, and the rending of every mesh that entangled him; it is the rebellion of the individual against obligations of every sort, social, moral, political, religious. Self will be free and follow its own will wherever it leads—free to enjoy every luxury that civilisation can give, without scruple from within or check from without.'

Lucy shuddered.

Charles laughed. 'This frightens you, and well it may, brought up as you are in the old world. I do not say that your old world is wrong, or that the new world which is beginning to live is right. They are counter principles. I tell you what is coming; I need no prophetic

instinct to see that. The individual for the first time since the fall of old Rome and heathenism is asserting itself. Hitherto the body corporate has been supreme.'

'That will be a terrible time. I dare not even think of it.'

'Not as bad as you suppose. In mechanics, when two forces meet, running in different directions, they do not kill each other, but they produce a resultant, that is, a force which goes in quite a new direction. The old idea is not exhausted, and when the new idea clashes against it, neither is neutralised so as to cease to be, both are modified and altered into a resultant of some sort. What the resultant will be when the counter forces in modern life meet, I cannot conjecture, but we shall see a new social departure in a direction of which we know nothing.'

'To return to Lady Grace.'

'You are right; to return to her. You see, I do not want to break away from the new current, to plunge myself in the old, which is passing away.'

'What prospect of happiness is there to either, with minds and principles so dissimilar, so conflicting?'

'That,' said he, and sighed, 'that is what I continually ask myself, and am as often frightened at the answer.'

'Oh, Cousin Charles! do not risk the ruin of her, of your life, by persevering.'

'Remember, Lucy, she encouraged me. She made the advance, not I. I would not have dared to speak unprovoked by her.'

'Cousin Charles! you must release her.'

'What!—and ruin the family?'

Lucy put her hands over her eyes. 'I must not interfere,' she said; 'my thoughts were only for her.'

'This is how matters stand, Lucy,' said Charles Cheek. 'I love and venerate Lady Grace above every woman in the world, but she is not the woman I desire as my wife. I suppose I am deficient in ambition. It may be that she would insist on a higher life, a life of more restraint than that I now lead, and this I do not choose to adopt. I belong to the new era, and declare for liberty. I like comfort, I like enjoyment, and I detest obligation. If I marry Lady Grace I throw myself into moral, social, and mental bondage. No doubt it would do me good, make a high-principled, conscientious English gentleman of me; but I refuse

the schooling, and the results are not to my taste. Lucy! I will give her up. I will go to my father and make the best terms I can for the family. It is I who shrink from the engagement, not she, and therefore we are bound to make some compensation.'

'Will you see her first?'

'No, I will write.'

Lucy drew a sigh of relief. 'I am sure your decision is right,' she said, 'cost what it may to the family.'

CHAPTER LIV.

A NEW LEAF.

CHARLES CHEEK went up to town next day, reached Paddington at 6 P.M., and in twenty minutes was at his father's house. We regret the necessity, but it is unavoidable, for the fourth time we must introduce the reader to the elder Cheek at meals. In fact the man was invisible at other times, except about the business of the Monokeratic establishment. This time, however, we see him not eating, but about to eat.

Charles acted on the present occasion with want of tact; he began on the subject uppermost in his mind before his father had eaten, whilst he was hungry and cross. Charles had not dined, but he was young and independent of his meals, whereas an old man is not. Mr. Cheek's business was one that occupied his mind actively all day, and his nervous system became

irritable towards evening. Mr. Gladstone was his ideal at 6 P.M., Sir Charles Dilke at 6.15, Chamberlain was hardly rancorous enough at 6.30, and Labouchere was the man for him at 6.45. At five minutes to seven he was furious against the Constitution, the Church, the House of Lords, his soap, hair-brushes, his cook, and the Royal Family. The old man was in his drawing-room, a room as tasteless as the dining-room. It reeked of Tottenham Court Road.

'It is all up,' said Charles.

'What is up? The glass or consols? Be explicit.'

'My engagement with Lady Grace Eveleigh.'

'Indeed—your engagement. Ugh! Thought they'd draw a score across that account. Who did it?'

'I—I released her. They are not to blame. I have written to say I will not hold her to her word.'

'You have, you—you Colorado beetle!'

'Yes, I have. I could endure the bondage no longer. I must have my clothes made for my back, not my back shaped to my clothes. I dare say the life of these aristocrats is very fine, and their ideas superfine, but I like a

broad life and unchastened ideas. I have tried how I could get on among them, and I am tired of the experiment.'

'So that is settled?'

'Yes, it is. The scheme was yours. I have done my best to accommodate myself to it, but it is impracticable.'

'Impracticable! Do you know what you have done? You have danced about this young woman long enough to fool me into believing you were in earnest, and I have bought up several of their mortgages, which I would not have touched but for you.'

'Deal generously with the family, father,' said Charles. 'It is not their fault that the engagement is broken off. It is entirely my own doing.'

'That matters not,' said Mr. Cheek roughly. 'I don't care for them, but I do care for my own money. I shall foreclose at once while the depression lasts. When land is up again, sell. That's business. I have a bill of sale on the contents of their houses. I'll release that pretty quick too.'

'Dinner is on the table, sir,' said the servant, entering.

'But, my dear father, I entreat you to con-

sider that it is I who wrong them, and that some reparation is due to them for the disappointment.'

'Do you hear?' roared the old man. 'Dinner is on the table!'

'Yes, but stay a moment, I entreat you.'

'What—let the fish get cold! Not for a score of Kingsbridges. Dinner is on the table. Go in!'

During dinner the old man scarcely spoke. He ate in a vindictive manner, as if he were hurting his son's feelings by each bite, and knew it, and delighted in doing it. When he cut the mutton he cut as though he were stabbing the offender; when he helped himself to gravy it was as though spooning up his blood; when taking potatoes and rice he dabbed the spoon into the vegetables as though stirring up and torturing his Charles's brain. When he drank he glowered over the rim of his glass at the young man. But he said nothing till the dessert was on the table and the servants withdrawn.

Then it was Charles who began.

'Father, I have a proposal to make which will surprise you. It is seriously made. I want you to put me in the way of earning my living.'

Mr. Cheek set down a macaroon he was

eating, and which was bitten in half, and stared at his son, then laughed insultingly.

'I am quite in earnest,' said the young man. 'Give me an opportunity of working and earning as much as will support me. I ask of you nothing further. I desire henceforth to be beholden to no one, not even to you. I wish to be responsible for my actions to no one, to cut away the right of controlling and rebuking me which you have exercised so freely and so offensively. When I was living on an allowance from you, you then had some right over me; when I live on my own earnings, you will have none. I will allow none. When the money was given to me, I did not know its value; when I earn it by hard work, I shall know what it is worth. You have been rough of tongue with me, and I have felt it, without caring to amend my ways and deserve better; when I am free from it, I may find a motive for reform.'

He spoke frankly; his pleasant handsome face bore in it an expression new to it, a look of dignity it had never worn before. His hair was light, almost white in the gaslight, his eyes were blue, and as he spoke moisture gathered in them. His hand was on the table, playing

with a raisin stalk—a white hand, well formed, that twitched and broke the stalk into many pieces, showing his nervous emotion.

Mr. Cheek said nothing, but stared open-eyed and open-mouthed.

'You do not understand me,' continued Charles, 'I allow that I have been a sorry fool. I am resolved to be so no longer. I should be a fool if I continued my pretence to the hand of Lady Grace, and mated out of my sort. I had an ambition once to be a soldier, and that you contradicted. Afterwards I had none. You provided me with money, and I spent it. I had no aim, no motive to do otherwise. You urged me to this grand connection, and I went along the path you pointed out, partly to please you, partly because myself dazzled. But my eyes have been opened in time. I see that it is not a way I can walk on. I will choose another, humbler; I will work for my livelihood, and then I can spend my life as my ambitions spring up and direct.'

'You are in earnest?'

'So much in earnest that I refuse the four hundred pounds you have allowed me hitherto.'

'Refuse the allowance!'

'Yes. I will not touch what I have not

earned, and so deprive you of the right to rebuke and outrage me.'

'Outrage you!' echoed the father.

'Yes, outrage me,' said the young man. 'I have endured a great deal from you. I have borne it because you are my father: but every offensive word from you I have felt more keenly than you have supposed possible. It has not spurred me to do better, it has driven me to do worse. Now that is over. I will be my own master henceforth, responsible to no man, and enduring insult from none.'

Mr. Cheek was still too amazed to speak. A dim consciousness that he had wronged his son awoke in his mind, but his mind was too coarse in texture to understand fully his fault. He was a rough man, who when out of humour used rough words. He meant them at the time, but he did not mean them to inflict mortal wounds. Education teaches man to measure his words, and check them as they pass from his heart over his tongue. Old Cheek had never had the education which imposes this self-restraint on speech. Charles had inherited from his mother a more sensitive nature than his father's; from boyhood he had been accustomed to hard words, and these had

alienated him from the old man, who loved him whilst he abused him. Charles was naturally weak, and his father's roughness had made him weaker. The old man had mortified his self-respect, till self-respect was almost dead within him. Now, suddenly, it had sprung to life and asserted itself.

Mr. Cheek stood up. He said nothing, and left the room. Charles saw no more of him that evening.

Next day at breakfast (the fifth meal at which we have met him), he asked his son whether he still meant what he had said the night before, and when Charles insisted that he had spoken seriously, the father said, 'Charles, I recognise something good in this. It gratifies me. Begin to work for yourself. Learn the value of every sixpence. I will put you with Messrs. Newcomen and Bowcher, ship-agents in Wapping. They will take you to oblige me. I will see them and arrange about salary.'

'I ask nothing better.'

'And—accept from me fifty pounds to begin life upon. You must live in lodgings. But we see no more of each other till you have grown into this new condition of life. If you go into lodgings you must have some money.'

'I accept it, father,' said Charles, 'and,' he added with faltering voice, 'pardon me if I spoke too plain, and wounded you last night.'

'Wounded me? Not a bit. Words break no bones.'

CHAPTER LV.

IN VAIN.

A MONTH had passed. Charles had not been seen by his father, who had fulfilled his undertaking, and had placed him with shipping agents, in a subordinate place. The old man had arranged with Messrs. Newcomen and Bowcher, who were ready to oblige him. Charles was to have plenty of work, and was to receive two pounds per week, of which, no doubt—though he did not know it—his father found a portion.

After the lapse of the month, Mr. Cheek, senior, visited the agents and inquired into the conduct of their new clerk. Messrs. Newcomen and Bowcher were glad to testify that, as far as they could judge, he was steady and attentive to his work. He had been regular in his attendance, careful, obliging, and reliable.

Then Mr. Cheek made an excursion to

Ebury Street, Pimlico, where his son lived in a boarding-house, kept by a Miss Jones. He chose a time for his visit when he knew his son would be at the office. Ebury Street, Pimlico, is a long way from Wapping, but Charles went to and fro by steamer from Vauxhall Bridge, and the air did him good.

Mr. Cheek found the dingy lodging-house kept by Miss Jones; he rang the bell, and rapped sharply with the knocker, and the door was opened by Miss Jones herself, a thin lady with curls, a pasty face, and eyes so pale in their colour that they must have been washed and rewashed with soda till all the colour had been washed out of them. Miss Jones was full of amiability when Mr. Cheek introduced himself, and hastened to assure him of the respectability of her establishment, the high social standing of her guests, and the comforts they enjoyed. The house was admirably situated, away from the fogs; and the health of the boarders was robust, as she could testify by their appetites. They breakfasted together, and she presided. She furnished them with coffee and tea, whichever they preferred. Some gentlemen were averse to tea in the morning, and they drank coffee. Others liked to

change their drink week and week about. Each had an egg and a rasher of bacon; sometimes she substituted bloater for rasher. There was always a rack of toast on the table, as a pleasant change to bread and butter. When the gentlemen returned from their offices they had tea, and in the evening supper off cold meat, bread, and cheese, 'best American. I had Dutch cheese for some time, but I find the American is preferred by the gentlemen, so I have that now.'

She went on to assure Mr. Cheek that her lodgers were of the most select description. For many years she had among them an old Waterloo officer, but he was dead. The lady lodging on the first floor ought, if everyone had his rights, to be a baronet, but her aunt, from whom she had great expectations, had left everything to a female companion who had exercised great influence over her at the last. It was a pity, Miss Jones thought, that the lady had not gone to law and upset the will, and recovered the title and a real sealskin jacket which had gone to the companion, worth forty pounds. Another of her lodgers was a gentleman of some literary fame, who at one time had earned five pounds by writing verses for Christmas cards.

Miss Jones went on to say that she charged for her lodgings a pound per week, exclusive of ale and washing, inclusive of a dinner on Sundays and Christmas Day.

Miss Jones did not provide the gentlemen with toilette soap, for she found them more fastidious in this particular than in their meat and drink. One liked glycerine, another oatmeal, and a third would use nothing but carbolic soap.

Mr. Cheek listened to Miss Jones without interrupting her, looking the faded woman through and through with his piercing eyes, taking stock of her. He was probably satisfied that, with a good deal of affectation, she was a worthy woman at core, for he gave a grunt, stood up, interrupted her flow of information, and begged to be conducted upstairs to his son's bedroom.

'Quite Alpine, I have been told,' said Miss Jones, as she conducted him to the very top of the house. 'The air at this altitude is keen, salubrious, and invigorating. The gentlemen all like the top storey, where they can see over the roofs. But, between ourselves, your son is my favourite, and I have accommodated him where he can have the finest view and the purest air. Yonder, sir, you can catch Doulton's

Pottery Works; the effect, with the morning sun on them, is very fine.'

Mr. Cheek looked round the little bedroom. It was in the roof, with a sloping ceiling. There was a fireplace, but the grate had not been used during Miss Jones's tenancy. The walls were hung with the cheapest of papers in two dingy colours. The furniture consisted of one chair, a chest of drawers with the mahogany veneering scaling away, a washhand-stand of painted deal suffering from cutaneous disorder, and a bed, above which hung a photograph in a frame. Mr. Cheek knew the picture. A duplicate had been sent to him some time ago. Through the ring of the frame, with its head drooping over the picture, hung a withered lily of the valley.

Mr. Cheek came slowly downstairs holding the banisters with one hand and rubbing his nose with the other.

'Will this last?' he said to himself. 'What can be the meaning of it all? As for his taking offence at any words I may have said when annoyed, that's absurd—a mere excuse. Words are wind, and wind blows away.'

When he reached the parlour again, he said

to the landlady, 'Look here, ma'am. I don't want you to tell my boy that I have been here to-day. Give him your best bedroom, not an attic broom-and-pail cupboard. Turn out, if need be, the old woman who missed a baronetcy. I'll pay the difference. Give the boarders kidneys for breakfast now and then, and fowls for supper, or anything else they fancy. Cost, ma'am, is no object to me. I can't feed Charles differently from the rest, so they must all be well-fed together. No more of your American cheese; Stilton and Cheshire, and, if you will, Gorgonzola. Not a word about me. Take all the credit to yourself.'

Charles was able to get away early on Whitsun-eve. Monday would be a Bank holiday. He had been hard worked, and worked till late at night for some weeks, and Messrs. Newcomen and Bowcher put up their shutters on Friday night, and allowed their clerks holiday from the Saturday to the Tuesday morning. Charles took an early train on Saturday to Plymouth, and arrived at the Barbican the same afternoon. He went to the Golden Balls immediately, without stopping to have anything to eat. His heart was beating fast. His step was light, his eyes full of glad expectation,

and he held his head up proudly. He was surprised to see that the house of Lazarus had been repainted. The shop was open. A good deal of business was done on a Saturday, double on the eve of a Bank holiday. People would pawn necessaries to obtain money for a day's pleasure.

He looked in at the window, and saw Joanna behind the counter talking to a woman who was in the shop with some article she wished to dispose of.

Charles waited till the woman came out, then he caught the door before she closed it, and stepped in.

Joanna, not hearing the door re-opened, did not suppose anyone had entered. She did not see him, as she was engaged examining the article—a brooch, which she had taken.

Charles had a few moments in which to observe her. She was well, even handsomely dressed, but pale and worn. She put away the brooch, and seated herself; then she leaned her elbow on the counter, and put her hand to her brow, and drew a deep sigh.

'Joe!'

She sprang to her feet, and stepped back. He saw her turn deadly pale, and then lean

both her hands on the counter to steady herself, as though afraid she would faint. She recovered herself, however, quickly, but her colour did not return as rapidly as her composure.

'Mr. Charles! You here?'

'Yes, dear Joe, I cannot help myself. I could not do otherwise than come. I have not had the chance before, and I have been hungering for the sight of your face, and for a word of encouragement from your lips. I came straight away by the morning train, and have just arrived. Why have you not answered my letters?'

'I sent you something.'

'Yes, a lily of the valley, but not a word accompanied it.'

'I sent you what I most valued, the first flower from the root Lady Grace gave me. I would not have parted with it to anyone else. I would not have picked it for myself, but—you have been kind to me, and—I thought I might never more have the chance of giving you anything.'

'Why did you not send me a word?'

Joanna made no answer. She looked down, her pallor remained, and she, who was usually

so collected, stood trembling before him. She tried to disguise her agitation by shuffling her hands to and fro on the counter.

'Oh, Joe! you know that all is up between me and Lady Grace. We did not suit each other. We belonged to distinct worlds, she to the world that is passing away, I to the world that is coming on—though, I admit, but a poor specimen of that. Now that is all over, and I am free. I am changed from what I was. You knew me as an idler and a spendthrift, without aim and without energy. Now I am a clerk in a shipping office. I do not live on my father's bounty. I have refused his allowance. I live on what I earn. I work now for my daily bread.'

She looked up and smiled, but there was intense sadness in her face that showed through her smile like a shower through a rainbow.

'I get a hundred pounds a year, and I have fifty pounds per annum of my own, left me by my mother, independent of my father. May I take a chair, Joe?'

She nodded, and pointed to one. He drew it beside the counter, and seated himself; but she remained standing with her elbow on the desk, and her hand over her eyes, shading her face.

'I am lodging with an old lady in Ebury Street,' he went on, 'and pay her a pound a week. I do not dine there, but at an eating-house, and that costs me about nine shillings a week, add a shilling for extras, and that comes to twenty-six pounds in the year. I think I can clothe myself on ten pounds, so that leaves just sixty-six pounds clear. I am to have my salary raised if I go on well. Now, Joe! Take away your hand, and let me see your face, let me look into your eyes. Will you give me the hope that you will come and be mine, and let us begin the world anew together? I will—I will work, and you shall never reproach me with idleness again. If I have you, I shall be happy; I shall care for nothing else. I shall do my work with a light heart, and sing over it, knowing that I am going home to *you*. You have done me a great deal of good already. You will make me do a great deal more hereafter, if you will consent to be with me always, to encourage me.'

He put up his hand to draw aside her arm from shading her face. Then he saw how great was her agitation. She was shaking like an aspen leaf, her face ash white, her eyes dim. She clasped her hands, and they quivered.

She unclosed them, and put one to her brow, and put it down again, then laid her hand on her breast, and seemed to gasp for breath. She could not speak.

'Joe!' he said, 'why do you not answer me? It was for you that I refused my father's help, that I might have the right to choose whom I would, and I will have none but you. You have had a wretched life here. I have led a wasted life. You have taught me to break away from my past, and I would release you, in return, from yours. We shall begin the world together on very little, but love lightens every load and seasons every dish.'

Then she put both her hands outspread before her, and touched his breast, as he leaned forward, and thrust him away. Her eyes were dark in their sockets, and gleamed. 'I cannot—I cannot,' she said, quivering in voice, eyes, and lips, and every muscle of her body.

He looked at her in surprise. 'Why not, Joe? You must, indeed. If you take from me this hope, this ambition, I dare not say what will become of me. It is only my love for you which has lifted me to the threshold of a better life; now that you have led me to it,

will you thrust me back into the folly and emptiness from which I have struggled up?'

'I cannot,' she said, slowly recovering herself. 'I signed you away for a hundred pounds. That is why I never answered your letters. That is why—now—now——' She could not speak. Something rose in her throat and choked her.

'Is that all?' exclaimed Charles. 'That was a joke.'

'No,' she answered, 'it was no joke to me. Your father was in earnest, so was I. And now it is too late—now——'

Then the door burst open, and Lazarus, in a black frock coat, rushed out of the inner part of the house.

'What! You here again? You dare to enter my premises. You scoundrel, you wastrel! Get out of my doors directly. Is it not enough that your father has snatched the Marquess from my grasp, but must you come here to carry off my wife also?'

'Stand back,' said Charles, thrusting the Jew away. 'I will not be touched by you. Wife! Joanna never shall be that if I can prevent it.'

'She is! Tell him, Joanna. Let him hear

it from your own lips—make the news the sweeter, perhaps.'

Charles stood looking from one to another, petrified.

'Mr. Charles,' said the girl without looking at him, but with face averted, and playing a tune with her fingers on the counter to conceal her trembling, 'I told you it was to be so. This morning we went together before the registrar, and after sundown the cohen will be here to marry us by Jewish rites.'

'You coward! you vile Jewish coward!' cried Charles, losing all control over himself, and seizing Lazarus by the collar and shaking him. 'You have taken a despicable advantage over this poor girl, to make her life ten thousand times more wretched than it was before.'

As he shook the Jew his blood heated, then boiled; and, blind to what he was about, stung by disappointed love, jealousy, disgust, flaring into inconsiderate rage, he took up one of the many sticks that were exposed in the shop for sale, and, holding Lazarus by the collar, swung him from side to side, beating him fast and hard. Lazarus screamed for help. He was not much hurt; he writhed so that the blows

fell on his new black frock coat, but now and then a cut caught him across the legs. A woman—Mrs. Thresher—who had been in the kitchen, hearing the shrieks, ran in, and then rushed forth into the street crying 'Murder!'

Charles was excited to madness at the tossings, and screaming, and dodging of the Jew, at his want of success in hurting him.

His arm relaxed at length; he was exhausted, and he cast the wretched man away.

'There!' said he; 'remember Charles Cheek in connection with your wedding-day.'

Next moment he was in the hands of the police, summoned by Mrs. Thresher.

'I give him in charge!' shouted the Jew. 'He has half-murdered me in my own house! Take him off to the lock-up!'

So it came about that Charles Cheek spent his Whitsun holidays in confinement.

CHAPTER LVI.

PREPARATORY.

For some weeks Lazarus had been in a bad temper, not at all in a lover's genial mood. His mortgages had been taken up by Mr. Cheek and his bills met; his power over the ducal family was ended. Disappointed revenge and frustrated ambition had combined to make him irritable. He was now in possession of a very large sum of money—of the whole of his savings through many years of privation and work, and he did not know what to do with it. He did not, of course, keep the money in the house; it was lodged with his banker. The question that recurred to him again and again was, How should he invest it? The ferment in his mind was a relief to Joanna. It saved her from annoyance. He almost forgot he was a lover in his anxiety about his money.

When they sat together over the kitchen

fire, his talk was of the condition of the money market, on promising investments, on the rise and fall of various stock which had attracted his interest; or he spoke fretfully of the selfishness of Cheek senior in coming to the assistance of the Kingsbridge family. At one time Cheek was an idiot, throwing away his money on coroneted fools; at another he was deep and selfish, robbing him, Lazarus, of the fruits of his labours, just as they were ripe for picking.

'I know what he'll do,' grumbled Lazarus. 'He'll puff Bigbury as he puffed his Monokeratic system, run up a hotel, build a town and call it Cheekville. Then his son Charles will marry well, become M.P., then Baronet, and so the unicorn will poke its way into respectability.'

But though Lazarus was not an ardent lover, he did not lose sight of the proposed change in his relation to Joanna.

'My dear,' he said, 'I've got a book of etiquette written by a lady of rank among the lots here, and I've read it. I learn from it that in good society it is not thought the *chic* for us to be married from the same house. So I've spoken to Mrs. Thresher—a very motherly body, though her line is ham and sausage—and

she will take you in; she has a spare room on the second floor, where you can reside till our nuptials. I hope you will find nothing to complain of in the marriage agreement which I have instructed Crudge to draw up and bring with him the day before our wedding. I have made over everything to you, because I really do not think I have a relative near enough for me to know him. With us of the seed of Israel, Joanna, maidens are always married on a Wednesday, and widows on a Friday; but, as you are not one of us it really does not matter what day is chosen, so I have fixed on Whitsun-eve as suitable, then the honeymoon can coincide with the Bank holiday, when excursion trips are cheap. With us, the marriage agreement is called the kynos, and is made on a Sunday, but, as you don't belong to the house of Israel, any day will do for that; and I've told Crudge to be here on the Friday. Then, on the Sabbath we'll walk over together to the registrar, as you're a Christian; and after sundown, when the Sabbath is over, and the Sunday begins, a cohen will come from Bristol and will marry us by religious ceremonial, as is customary among us. What a fortunate thing it is, Joanna, that I kept the howdah all these years. At last it will come in serviceable; for

in our marriage ceremony the bridegroom and the bride stand under a canopy of silk or some precious stuff, and the cohen blesses them, and takes a ring from me and puts it on your finger, whilst I say, "Verily thou art espoused unto me, according to the rites of Moses and Israel." After that a gobletful of red wine is handed to the cohen, and he blesses it, just puts his lips to it, and passes it to us. We shall have to empty it between us, and then I dash the goblet on the ground and break it, by way of putting you in mind that you are but brittle ware.' Lazarus shook his head. 'Ah, Joanna! what are ceremonies without a moral meaning?'

'Is that all?'

'Yes, that is all. Now, although you must sleep and have your meals at Mrs. Thresher's, I don't see that you need neglect the shop. I shall be very much engaged, as the three rooms upstairs have to be cleared, and a new range put in the kitchen. Talking of ranges,' said Mr. Lazarus, rubbing his chin in his palm, 'they are difficult things, what with their dampers and traps. They are like organs, only to be played upon by one who understands the stops. And where will you find a cook who understands a range? When she wants to

bake she pulls out both the dampers, one of which is designed to draw the fire away from the oven to the boiler; and when she wants to boil, she pulls out both dampers, one of which is designed to draw away the fire from the boiler. And when she wants neither to bake nor to boil, she pulls out both dampers, and carries the fire up the chimney, which is just the same as if an organist pulled out stop diapason and hautboy when he wanted pianissimo; and tremolo and dulciano when he wanted forte; and diapason, hautboy, tremolo, and dulciano when he wanted nothing in particular. Come here, Joanna.' He made her follow into his sanctum. 'We must have a clearance here. It is a loss, but it cannot be helped. Do you see all those shelves full of chemist's drugs? I took the lot once for a bad debt, but I've never been able to sell them. Ipecacuanha, cod-liver and castor oils, extract of senna, mercurial ointment, tincture of taraxacum, arnica, laudanum. There is enough there to dose the Barbican.'

'What, am I to throw them all away?'

'Yes, unless you can dispose of them better. And you can sell the bottles.'

'I shall find a use for them,' said Joanna.

CHAPTER LVII.

RELEASE.

'Mr. Lazarus,' said Joanna.

'Call me Emmanuel, or, for short, Em.'

'Mr. Lazarus,' said Joanna, disregarding the interruption, 'you will not proceed against Mr. Cheek.'

'Why not? Show me the reason. Didn't he shake me, and slap me, and bang me, and beat me with a stick? Didn't he burst the buttons off me, and nigh upon throttle me with my cravat? And didn't he tumble my teeth out and break the laces of my stays? Am I to sit down under all these provocations and bear them like a lamb?'

'I entreat you to pass this over. Do not appear against him.'

'No, no, Joanna. Do not try this on too soon. We are not wed yet, and when we are, you will have to learn that wedlock does not

make a missus of you over me. Mistress of the house, of the pots, and pans, and the servant if we have one—though I dare say we can manage if Mrs. Thresher will come in charing —mistress over Mrs. Thresher if you like, but not over me. Do you know that every day I say the Berochos shel shachrit, and bless Providence that I am not born a Gentile, born a slave, and born a woman. Among you Christians the order of the domestic world is inverted, and the woman dominates over man and beast. It is not so with us. The Parsees have a very good custom. Every morning the wife falls down before her husband's feet and worships him. Even we Jews have not attained to such a pitch of enlightenment as that. In the Aisher-Yotsar every day we thank Providence for having made openings in us, eyes wherewith to see, ears wherewith to hear, nostrils wherewith to smell, doors these for the acquisition of information, and we pray that they may ever be kept open ; and now, through these same doors to-day imbibe the lesson that, in this house, I remain master. In whatsoever capacity you be, whether as maid-of-all-work, or as pawn, or as wife, I remain above you, as the sun is above the earth. Your orbit is about me, not mine round you.'

Preparations had been made in the house for the change in the condition of the two usual inmates. Three upper rooms had been completely cleared of their contents, and they had been adapted for habitation. That commanding the street, immediately over the shop, was to be the drawing-room, another was furnished as the dining-room. In one way or another Lazarus disposed of a great deal of rubbish. He groaned over it, because he was losing money. 'This sofa,' said he, 'must go for twelve and three, and the cabinet for fifteen and nine. If I bided my time I might dispose of the sofa for two guineas, and the cabinet for fifty shillings, but let this loss of three pound four—say three guineas—be an evidence to my Joanna of the love and self-sacrifice lodged in this bosom. Love may well be described as a devouring flame; it consumes a lot of capital.'

The beds, the tables, chairs, wardrobes, uniforms, crockery, were disposed of, and space made for the painters and paperers to get to work. The staircase was put to rights, the floors relaid. 'Though why the floors should be made pretty, when they will be covered by carpets, is more than I can see.'

On Saturday morning the Jew and Joanna,

with Mrs. Thresher and her husband, appeared before the registrar, the two latter as witnesses.

'If I was to die intestate, and without a family,' said Lazarus, 'half of all I'm possessed of would go to the widow, and the other half to the next of kin, and it would take something to find a kinsman. But now I have made you to take all, Joanna, by my marriage settlement, which Crudge brought here yesterday for signature. Which is another proof—if proof were wanting—how fond I am of you. Joanna, when I come to consider all I've done for you, how I have lifted you out of the dirt, so to speak, to make you my consort, and how I have scattered the contents of the three upper rooms, and how I have made liberal provision for you should you survive me—I say that, considering all this, I think there should be no bounds to your gratitude and devotion to me.'

The upper room, intended as dining-room, was prepared for the occasion of the religious ceremonial. In the middle hung a brass lamp of seven nozzles, the Sabbatical lamp, with seven wicks, which were all burning. The howdah, raised on four poles, a richly decorated canopy of red silk embroidered with gold

thread, rested against the wall; on an ormolu marble-topped side table stood a large crystal goblet filled with purple wine. The day was not quite set, but the blinds were drawn that the inquisitive people of the marine store opposite, who were well aware what was about to take place, and whose windows commanded the room, might be debarred participation in the ceremony. Directly the sun set, and the Sabbath was over, the Rabbi would arrive, together with some Plymouth Jews and Jewesses, invited to be present. For the occasion, Mrs. Thresher presided in the kitchen.

Lazarus was in high excitement. He had eaten nothing all day, as a Jew is required to fast on his wedding day. He was restless. He ran about the house to assure himself that all was in readiness. As the Saturday before a Bank holiday was one in which much business was done, he had sent Joanna into the shop. The opportunity of making something was not to be neglected. It took him some time to put himself to rights after the thrashing he had received from Charles Cheek. His shirt and his new cloth clothes, and his glossy dyed hair were all ruffled, but his temper was more

ruffled than they, less easily smoothed. It was unreasonable of Joanna to ask him to forgive Charles. Who is disposed to forgive injuries on an empty stomach? Lazarus was heated, fretted, fuming, his cunning eyes sparkling with feverish light.

A small room on the ground floor had been cleared for Joanna, as a place in which she could sit instead of occupying the kitchen. Hitherto it had been filled with goods. It was rather bare of furniture, and was uncarpeted, but then, as Lazarus said, why launch out into extravagance over a room no one would be received into?

The sun had set. Joanna was seated in this room. The shutters had been put up in the shop. There was twilight at this time of the year, and the girl sat in the window looking out into the street, in the twilight. The guests were arriving; the ladies in their richest dresses—handsome young Jewesses with splendid eyes, and elderly Jewesses gross and coarse; Jews in evening suits under their overcoats, with white ties, and white kid gloves, and waistcoats festooned with chains. The cohen had come, and had been received with respect.

Joanna would not appear till the last moment. She heard the trampling of the feet in the passage, Mrs. Thresher's voice as she divested the ladies of their wraps. She heard the feet go up the steep stairs, and then the buzz of the voices overhead.

Polly Thresher was there, the daughter of the ham shop, a young lady who was barmaid at an inn, but who had come for the occasion to help. Polly was not an old bird, she fed on chaff; she gave chaff also. She was thought to be pretty, and assumed the airs of a beauty—a forward, fast young lady, accustomed to the society of the gentlemen who hang about a bar. She and a young Jewess were to be Joanna's bridesmaids, and lead her to the dining-room and the howdah, when all were arrived and ready for the performance of the ceremony.

Joanna sat by the window, looking wistfully into the street, without looking at anything in particular. She had her hands in her lap, folded. A hard despairing expression was on her face.

Miss Thresher put her head in. 'Oh my! not got your veil on, miss? The gents and ladies is nigh all assembled, also the minister, with a long beard.'

'Polly,' said Joanna, 'do me a favour. Ask Mr. Lazarus to come down.'

The good-natured girl nodded, and ran upstairs. A moment after the usurer entered the room.

'Heigh, Joanna,' he said; 'looking beautiful in that dress; wanting in colour rather. I wish I could persuade you to use a little rouge de théâtre. There is a make-up box in that cupboard. One always reads of a "blushing bride," and you look as though you had dusted your face over with blanc de perle. Put on diamonds. Don't shrink. The ladies upstairs have piled on all the jewelry they could borrow, and I don't want you to fall short. I've not made as much show hitherto as others, but I've more money than any man in the room upstairs.'

'Mr. Lazarus,' she said, 'I have sent for you once more to entreat you not to appear against Mr. Charles Cheek. He has just turned over a new leaf, has left his father and entered an office —he is with shipping agents—and he lives on what he earns. Let him go quietly back on Monday. Do not stand in his way. I ask you this as a personal favour. I have not asked you many favours. This shall be my last. Will you grant it me?'

'No, Joanna, most certainly not. It is of no use your interceding with me for that scapegrace. It is a principle with me that no one shall touch me without suffering for it, and I am sure you would not have me go against principle.'

'I implore you, let him go! I will ask you on my knees.'

'No,' answered the Jew, 'I will not. Not now, and never.'

Then he left.

'In five minutes we shall expect you,' he said, in the door. 'Miss Phillips will come down for you.'

She remained seated. Her lips moved. She plucked a little bunch of lily of the valley from her bosom, looked at it, kissed it, and replaced it. Then she folded her hands again, and remained motionless.

People passed in the street. Boys romped, women scolded. A cart went by laden with fish, then a wheelbarrow with whiting. Some sailors, half tipsy, drifted past, singing, squabbling. The lamplighter came to turn the gas and ignite it. She watched him, bending forward to observe how often he missed the tap. She put her hand to her brow; it was burning,

but her hands and feet were like ice. She was in white silk, and beside her, over a chair, hung a rich lace veil.

Seven years ago, on that very day, her mother had brought her to the Golden Balls. Every circumstance came back upon her memory with vivid distinctness. Seven years of slavery, leading now to what was worse a hundred times.

'Fool that I was,' she muttered, 'to climb out of the water. Better have choked in that slime than have come to this. I have lived in hope, and now hope is dead. My mother has died, I know not when and I know not where, and I was not by her to close her eyes and receive her last kiss.'

Then she heard a tap at the door.

She stood up and threw the veil over her head.

'Are you ready?' asked Miss Polly Thresher and Miss Phillips, standing in the doorway. 'Everyone is ready, and expecting you.'

She turned once more with a face that darkened as though a fold of the coming night had dropped over it, towards the window, irresolute, unwilling to go.

At that moment she heard a voice, and her

heart stood still. The voice was in the street and the tones were familiar.

'Here, lass! Thou'lt find t' bairn right enough.'

Joanna uttered a piercing cry, and dashed through the door, driving the two girls standing in it to right and left. In another moment she was in the street, laughing, crying, clasping a woman, whilst a burly skipper stood by, with his hands in his pockets, and chuckled.

'Mother! mother!' she cried, 'I knew you would come. I was sure you would not desert me. Only just at the last my trust gave way. Now all is well! Oh, so well! mother! mother!'

The woman she clung to was indeed the same poor creature whom we saw in the first chapter of the story throw herself and the child into Sutton Pool.

She was thin, oldened, haggard, with grey in her hair, and a wandering look in her eyes, but the face was the same. Joanna knew her instantly. Her heart leaped towards her with a spasm of mingled joy and pain. The poor woman seemed quite as poor as when she tried to drown herself seven years before. She did not seem to have gained much more courage to

battle with the hardships of life during these years.

Joanna drew her into the house, thrust the two young women impatiently, angrily, away, brought her mother into her own room, and then shut and locked and bolted the door against intruders.

Hastily she placed her mother in the chair she had recently occupied, and held her, looked into her worn face, then covered it with kisses and tears: clasped the hands, rough, soiled, wrinkled, and bathed them with tears, and dried them with her burning lips. Then she held the hands to her beating heart as though their pressure would lull its tumult.

'Oh, mother! my own, my own, my dearest mother!'

She could say no more, only repeat these words again and again, and intercept them with fresh transports. Then she cast herself on her knees and threw one arm about her mother's waist and the other round her neck, and laid her own hot cheek and burning head against the bosom on which they had rested so often, and where they had found comfort in olden times.

'Oh, mother! my sweet mother!' she repeated, and laughed, and wiped her tears away

against the poor woman's breast. 'Oh, my mother! my mother! God be praised! God be praised!'—and that was the first time Joanna had ever raised her heart to one above. Her joy was so great that it gave her soul wings for the moment, and carried her, unconsciously, on high.

When she became a little calmer she slightly relaxed her hold that she might look at her mother's face attentively, by the light of the street lamp.

'Why, my child,' said the poor woman, 'what is this? Why are you dressed in this fashion? Are you going to be married?'

At the same moment the girls outside tapped loudly, and Polly Thresher called through the door—

'They be all waiting, and Mr. Lazarus has sent down to know why you are not come up. Please be quick, miss!'

'Mother!' exclaimed Joanna, 'help me.'

She threw off the veil, and tore off the white silk dress and everything she had on wherewith she had been adorned for the marriage, and eagerly, with hasty fingers, put on her old stuff dress, patched and darned, and her house slippers.

'I am coming,' she said triumphantly to those without. 'Tell them I am ready.'

Then she threw open the door, ran into the shop, took the ledger from the desk, and catching her mother by the hand, drew her with her up the stairs into the room, where a gaily dressed and glittering party were assembled—a room brilliantly lighted—and, drawing her mother after her, pressed forward, and threw the ledger on the table.

'Lazarus!' she cried, with exultation in her voice. 'My mother has come, and brought the money and the duplicate. Score me out! I am no longer Six-hundred-and-seventeen. I am free.'

CHAPTER LVIII.

THE LAST OF THE EMS WATER.

JOANNA was resolute. It was in vain that those present represented to her that she had been with Lazarus to the registrar's office, so that in the eye of the law she was already married. She refused peremptorily, absolutely, to go through the religious ceremony. She was triumphant, defiant. Her eyes were sparkling, her cheeks kindled. No necessity now for the make-up box and rouge de théâtre.

'I wouldn't be drowned, I said, this day seven years, and I won't be wedded now,' she said.

Everyone spoke at once. The cohen addressed her seriously, Mrs. Thresher, who came up, overwhelmed her with reproaches. Lazarus stormed and screamed with rage, and insisted on her obedience to his wishes. But the time for submission was past. As long as

he was her master she had served him, in cold and hunger and rags. She had begged for him, bargained for him, fought for him. She had nursed him in sickness, she had guarded his goods like a watch-dog. She never had defrauded him of a penny. Now that she was free she would not be his wife.

She paid no attention to those present; their voices sounded in her ears, but she did not hear their words; she saw the persons that surrounded her as figures in a dream. One face alone was distinct before her—her mother's, one voice alone entered her ears and reached her brain—her mother's. Her soul was like a long-closed room, into which no light has entered; suddenly the shutters are thrown back, and the window flung open, and the whole chamber is full of summer sweetness and sunny splendour. Her step was elastic, flame leaped through her pulses and flashed in her eyes. She had recovered her mother, the only person in the world to whom she belonged, who belonged to her, the mother on whose lap she had laid, in whose arms she had been rocked, against whose heart she had cried herself to sleep, the mother who was the truest, most unchangeable of friends, the best of

refuges in sorrow, the surest of counsellors—she had everything now—everything of which she had been deprived for seven years.

Heedless of every circumstance, deaf to every argument, blind to every advantage, she drew her mother away. She wanted to be alone with her again, to hear her story and to tell her own, to sweep her away again in the flood of her overflowing love. She held her hand so fast that not for a moment could the poor woman disengage herself. Mrs. Rosevere was bewildered. She understood nothing of what went on about her, the lighted room, with the gentlemen in evening dresses, the ladies glittering with jewelry, the crimson canopy, the seven-flamed lamp, her daughter's strange demeanour. She was a timid woman with a mazed mind at the best of times; and this sudden episode completely distracted her.

Joanna brought her mother back into the room below, and fastened the door, but Lazarus had followed and was kicking and hammering at it with his fists, and swearing that he would have her out. He would not be insulted thus before all his guests.

Joanna remained quietly in her chair, clinging to her mother. There was disturbance

outside. Voices speaking in the passage to Lazarus, he answering in shrill tones, in accents of passion; the trampling of feet and the slamming of the house-door, and after awhile, stillness. The guests had withdrawn to laugh with each other outside the house, on their way home; Polly was with her mother in the kitchen, uttering exclamations of amazement and disgust.

When all was quiet, and the fear of being disturbed had passed away, then Joanna said, 'And now, my darling mother, tell me all that you have done and gone through during these seven years—and tell me why you did not come to release me earlier.'

Then the poor faded woman narrated a long story of troubles, beginning with her sickness on board Mr. Hull's boat, and how she had been taken to a hospital, and got better, and been discharged, and had gone into service and earned some money, which had been dissipated by a return of sickness. A story of recurrent toil and disappointment, of saving and scattering, of hope and despair. Joanna sat by her, holding her hands and pressing them, and when she heard how her mother had toiled she kissed her hands, and when she heard how she

had been sick she flung her arms about her and swayed her, and sobbed and fondled her. Mrs. Rosevere went on to tell how that at last she had been able to gather together a little money, and how she had gone to Goole and had waited there, taking odd jobs of work, till she could find a boat which was going with coals to Plymouth, for she could not afford the railway journey; and how at last she had found Mr. Hull loading to go there—and how now, at length, she was back in Plymouth. The story took a long time in telling, for the poor woman was a rambling talker, who lost her thread and went on without it, and then picked it up at the wrong place and generally entangled it. But Joanna was not critical; she made out all she wanted to know, that the mother's heart had yearned through seven years for the child, as the child's heart had yearned seven years for the mother.

A rough tap at the door, and Mrs. Thresher's voice.

Joanna went to the door and unlocked.

'We can't remain here all night, you know,' said the old woman roughly, even rudely. 'We've got our own duties to fulfil—and a mussy it is some folks are found in the world

who do their duties. Polly has to go back to the "Coach and Horses," and I've got my swearing old Radical husband to attend to. So we are off.'

'Very well,' said Joanna, 'you can go.'

'And I hope somebody will be ashamed of herself, and of giving people a lot o' trouble for nothing, and of her ingratitude to the best of masters, and——' Joanna slammed the door in her face. This did not interrupt or put a stop to Mrs. Thresher's grumblings. She grumbled as she got into her bonnet, grumbled herself out of the house, and grumbled all the way along the Barbican to her own home, where her grumbling was drowned by the louder, more boisterous political grumbling of Mr. Thresher.

Joanna sat stroking her mother's hair till Mrs. Thresher was out of the house, and then she began to tell her mother her own story.

She told the story with perfect frankness. She hid nothing from her. She told her about Charles Cheek, and the necklace, and the pink silk dress; she told her about Court Royal, and described to her Lady Grace; she told her of how she had been caught, and was obliged to run away; she told her of the subscription ball, and then she told her how Charles had been there that day, had beaten Lazarus, and was

now in the lock-up till Lazarus should appear against him. She told her mother also how that she had been about to be married to Lazarus, when, in the nick of time, she—her dear mother—had arrived to release her. Then she was silent for a few moments, holding her mother's hand between both of hers, and hers twitched with nervousness. 'Mother,' she said, then hesitated; 'mother—hush; does no one hear?' She listened. The house was still. She did not hear the tread of Lazarus upstairs. Nevertheless she was not satisfied; she went to the door, opened it, looked along the passage, then returned, took her mother's hand again between her own, and said, 'Mother—I had made up my mind. I never could, I never would, be his. I would not have lived.'

'What do you mean, dear?'

'I should have destroyed myself.'

'Oh, Joanna! Joanna!' The poor woman shrank back.

'Mother, when you were in your deepest despair, and you saw no light before you, you threw yourself into the water. I was driven to the last point of endurance. I could not, I would not, endure to be his wife. It would have destroyed all my self-respect. I thought

how I could escape, and I saw no other way but this.'

The woman shuddered. 'I did wrong, my child, very wrong; the Lord forgive me, a poor sinner. I was as one mad at the time.'

'I was not mad,' said Joanna, 'but in my soberest sense. I would never, never be his—I would die first; that was the only way of escape that I could think of. Mr. Lazarus is not a bad man altogether, and I have a kind of regard for him; he has his good points; but I cannot, and I will not endure him as a husband. Can you understand me, mother? A horror and loathing came on me—and, just as you came by, I was looking out of the window to say good-bye to the daylight which I thought I should never see again.'

'It was very, very wrong,' whispered the mother.

'I can't see that. I have two consciences, one pawnbroking, the other womanly. The first had no opinion about it, the other was very positive it was what I ought to do.'

'But how—oh, Joanna!' The poor woman shuddered.

'I had my plans. Lazarus had told me to clear away a number of bottles of drugs and

chemicals from his room. Among them was a stoppered phial of laudanum, and Charles had told me about that. It gives no pain when taken, but sends you to sleep, and you sleep peacefully away into the endless sleep.'

The mother, shivering and white, held Joanna away from her.

'What else could I do? Whither could I go? I had no one to whom I belonged and with whom I could find a home. I could not remain in this house with him any more as his servant after he had wanted to make me his wife, and his wife I would not be.'

Her mother was trembling as with cold—as she trembled on that same day seven years before when she stood in the same house, though not in the same room, and when she was drenched with sea-water.

'You may say—There was Mr. Charles Cheek. But, mother, his visit came too late. I had been already to the register office with Mr. Lazarus. It is true he had written to me two or three times, to tell me what he was about, but he had not said a word in those letters about wanting me to be his wife. And, even if he had, I must have refused him, because I gave him up to his father for a

hundred pounds. Now, mother, would it have been honourable in me to take that money, and afterwards go from my agreement to which I had signed my name? No, I could not, much as I like Charles—and I do, I do like him. I could take him as little as I could Mr. Lazarus. I have a conscience. I have two—they may be queer to the fancy of some folk, but they are plain and outspoken to me, and what they say, that I do, and no haggling and bargaining and beating down with them. So you see, mother, there was no help for it. I thought, when I made my plan, that if I took all the laudanum myself, master would find it out and fetch a doctor, and they would bring me round, so I was resolved to give him some of the laudanum also, enough to——'

'Oh, Joanna!' in a tone of agony and horror; 'not to kill him also?'

'No, mother, I had no thought of that. That would be murder, and no provocation would bring me to that. No. I thought if he should swallow enough to make him confused, and unable to understand what had taken me, that he would be as one drunk, and sleep, and wake when I was past recovery.'

Mrs. Rosevere wrung her hands, uttered a

faint cry, and slipped out of the chair upon her knees, and, pressing her hands to her bosom, said, 'My God! my God! I thank Thee that Thou didst bring me here in time to save the soul of my poor child.'

Joanna waited till her mother had recovered herself somewhat before she proceeded with her narrative. She drew her back upon the seat, and took her hand again between her own. Her face was earnest and pale now; it had lost its light and colour.

'Mother, the Jews have a ceremony at their weddings of filling a large glass with red wine, and the bridegroom sips this, then passes it to the bride, who also sips it. Then he finishes it, and when it is empty he dashes it to fragments on the ground. I had to prepare everything upstairs, and I poured the laudanum into the goblet, and mixed it well with the wine. Then I purposed, when it came to me to sip, to take a long deep draught, leaving only just enough for Lazarus to suit my purpose. None would suspect what I had done. I would go away to my little attic-room and lock the door, and lay me down on the bed and never wake again, and that would have been the end of my story, mother, had not you

arrived at the proper moment, and for a second time given me life.'

'Joanna,' said Mrs. Rosevere, 'this is very terrible, and I cannot bear to think of it. God forgive me that I ever showed you a way out of misery. The Lord interfered then to save me from myself; and the Lord has interfered now to save you. Now, Joanna, to my thinking, there is no time to be lost, we must go upstairs at once and throw away the poison. It must not be left exposed another minute.'

'Yes, mother,' said the girl, 'you are right. It is the last duty I have to do in this house, and it shall be done forthwith. After that we will go out and leave it, never to set foot over its threshold again.'

They ascended the stairs together. The door was shut. Joanna knocked. She received no answer.

'Perhaps Mr. Lazarus has gone out,' whispered her mother. 'If so, we must not leave the house till his return.'

Joanna opened the door into the newly-furnished dining-room. The apartment would have been dark but for the flicker of the seven-wicked Sabbatical lamp. Lazarus, governed always by the idea of economy, had extinguished

the candles. The lamp-wicks burned badly, and the light was lurid.

Joanna and her mother stood in the doorway looking round. All at once the woman uttered a piercing cry, and staggered back. Joanna at the same moment started forward.

On the floor, under the red silk gold-embroidered canopy, lay Lazarus, as one dead, holding the empty goblet in his hand.

The girl raised him on her knee, tore off his cravat, and lifted his head on her bosom. He was breathing heavily. Mrs. Rosevere dashed water in his face.

'He must be made to stand,' said the woman. 'He must be kept on his feet, walking all night. He must be forced to keep awake.'

'Oh, mother, he has been fasting since yesterday at sunset, and he has taken this on an empty stomach. Hold him, mother, hold him whilst I run. I know what to give him. That was not sold—that will save him—the rest of the Ems water.'

CHAPTER LIX.

WITHOUT A WATCH-DOG.

Mrs. Rosevere and her daughter had an anxious night with Lazarus. They were afraid to send for a doctor, lest he should discover what had been done. They walked the Jew about, and forced him to drink Ems water, and did not venture to leave him till morning, when they put him to bed in his old room downstairs.

He was obliged to remain in bed next day, and Joanna and her mother attended him. He was surly, and snarled at them. He could not forgive Joanna. He received her attentions with resentment. He was ignorant of the cause of his illness. He supposed that he had had a fit.

As he got better he occupied himself in bed whittling a stick. On Monday, after he had eaten a chop and drunk a bowl of soup made for him by Joanna, and brought him by Mrs.

Rosevere, he suddenly leaped out of bed armed with his stick, and chased the woman from his room, then rushed after her into the kitchen, where he fell upon Joanna, full of malice and fury, swore and cursed and threatened, and struck her over the head with the stick. 'Get out of this place. Never show your face in it again, you ungrateful minx. Eating me out of house and home. Oh, yes! Chops and soup! You can't stint yourselves when I am ill and unable to look after you.' Then he drove them out of his house.

As soon as they were gone he bolted and barred the door. He had refused to allow Joanna to take anything away which the girl might claim as her own. She had pleaded for nothing but the pot of lily of the valley, and that he refused.

When Lazarus had thrust Joanna forth, he returned to his room to dress. He trembled with anger, anger that had been simmering in his mind since Sunday morning, but which he had kept in control till he was strong enough to give it vent.

'I am well rid of her,' he said, laying aside his stick. 'Blighted be the day that I took her in. This is the gratitude I receive for

having nurtured her in my bosom, a viper that turns and stings me. What is the world coming to? Where is morality left? Here is this girl that I have cared for, and instructed, and fed, and given my society to, turns my head, puts me to frightful expense, makes me sell off a lot of capital furniture at half its value, and involves me in bills to tradesmen for painting and papering, and carpentering and plumbing, turns the whole house upside down, and in the end—flouts me in the face of my own people, makes me ridiculous. Well said the Rabbi Nathan that Manoah was a fool, because it is written in the Book of Judges, "He followed his wife." For whoever runs after a woman takes leave of his senses.'

Lazarus wandered about his house looking at the changes that had been made in it, and groaning. The bills of the tradesmen had not come in. He would have to pay them. He climbed the stairs to Joanna's attic room, and found a malicious pleasure in flinging her pots of flowers out of the window on the stones of the quay or into the water, hoping that she might be near to see and bewail the destruction of her cherished possessions. He found the photograph of herself and Charles Cheek. He had not seen it before.

'That's the way my money went! Oh, if I could but find a case on which to prosecute her!' He tore the picture to pieces and flung it into the street.

There was nothing else in the room that Joanna could have called her own, on which he might vent his spite. He crept downstairs again. His legs were not firm under him, the laudanum or the Ems water had weakened him, and they shook.

'I'll have Mrs. Thresher to look in on me every day, I will. She is a sensible woman, and took Joanna's conduct to heart. I'll get her to let Polly come and mind the shop. She's a sharp girl, and if I promise to deal handsomely by her, perhaps she'll give up the bar and take to the counter. I'll let that scorpion know that I can do without her.'

He wondered at himself, as he stood in the carpeted and furnished rooms, for having been induced to change his old mode of life. His object for many years had been to revenge himself on the Marquess. For that he had stinted himself; and when his opportunity was taken from him he had been unsettled, without an object for which to work and deny himself. Man must have some aim; when one is taken

from him he finds another. When revenge was disappointed, love occupied the field. He had begun to dream of a happy life, such as he had dreamed of when he married his first wife. He had been disappointed in his first dream, now the second was dispelled.

'I'll send for Crudge to-morrow,' he said. 'I'll see if I can't have that confounded settlement altered. What a fool I was to have any at all, but I was infatuated. I thought, after all the marks of tenderness I showered on the girl, she must love me. What wicked ingratitude after all I have done! Her keep must have cost five-and-twenty pounds per annum, and she has been with me seven years, that is a hundred-and-seventy-five pounds—then her clothing. Why! I've spent on the minx two hundred pounds at the lowest computation—and now to desert me! What I have wasted on her would have brought me in ten pound per annum at five per cent.'

He fussed about his shop, now closed. He routed in the drawers, he poked about in the kitchen, in the vain hope of discovering that he had been robbed of something by Joanna, so as to be able to take out a summons against her. He could not find that anything was

gone. Darkness closed in. The wind piped and sobbed under the doors and in at the key-holes, and the rain drizzled against the window-panes.

'Ah!' said Lazarus shuddering, 'a south-west wind blowing up Channel, charged with moisture. Twenty-four hours of rain. I hope Joanna and her mother are out in it, without shelter for their heads to-night.' He listened to the drip from the window-ledges, and the pour down the fall pipe. 'They were wet when first they came into this house, may they be as wet and shivery now they leave it!'

He groped for sticks to light his fire. He was unsuccessful. The art of making a fire is not in man, it is instinctive in woman. He either lays it or lights it wrong. Lazarus found out that he had to deal with a most intractable art. The sticks were too thick, or the paper too profuse, or the coals sluggish in kindling. A whole newspaper went in a flare without lighting the wood, and when the wood was kindled with the application of a candle, it refused to communicate its fire to the coals.

So he sat in the cold and dark, growling and miserable. Then he heard a scratching noise about him, like the uncurling of crumpled

paper. He struck a match, relit the candle which had been extinguished whilst applied to the sticks in the grate, and saw that the floor was alive with blackbeetles, which fled in all directions when the match flared.

He left the candle lighted on the table, and relapsed into his chair, and into brooding over his wrongs.

He was dissatisfied with the prospect before him. He would never be able to replace Joanna. Mrs. Thresher was a voracious eater, and would expect her meals at his house. He would have to keep Polly as well, and he was doubtful whether Polly would settle into the business after the more lively experiences of the bar. He reasoned with himself that life with Joanna would have been a daily struggle. Set a beggar on horseback and he will ride to the devil; give a savage clothes, and a wardrobe will not suffice him. Translated from the kitchen to the parlour, from being in subjection to sharing the rule, she would have indulged in extravagance, have loved idleness, neglected business for pleasure. Then he thought of Charles Cheek; and he asked whether Joanna was not really fond of him. How she had interceded for him! His

picture, taken hand-in-hand with her, he had discovered in her bedroom. If he had Joanna as his wife, might he not expect a similar experience to that he had undergone with Rachel?

Then he felt again the sting of the blows Charles had dealt him, the shaking, the humiliation before the eyes of Joanna, and his blood rushed to his face. Charles had been in confinement since Saturday afternoon. On Monday, being a Bank holiday, no magistrate was sitting. Tuesday, at eleven, he would go and take out a proper summons against him. The police were not likely to act heartily in the matter. They knew Charles Cheek, and had received many a tip from him.

How bad the candle burned! What was that? He had lighted a wax candle from upstairs instead of a kitchen dip. That came of having strangers in the house! Mrs. Thresher could use nothing but the best for the kitchen. A curl of wax was formed at the side of the candle, folding over and over like a winding sheet. No wonder the candle burnt badly, a thief was in it. Lazarus snuffed the wick with his fingers, and snuffed out the light.

At once, from all sides, came the rustling of

the blackbeetles emerging from their holes and spreading over the floor. Lazarus fancied they were about his chair, scrambling up his legs. He stood up, shook himself, relit the candle, and ran about, stamping on the retreating insects.

How lonely he felt in the house! How still it was, like a house that was dead! A chill sense of solitude crept over him. What if he had another fit in the night. What if he woke up, feeling ill, wanting brandy, or to be bled, and no one was in the house to come to his help; and he was senseless or weak in the morning, unable to open the door when Mrs. Thresher came? But—would Mrs. Thresher come? Perhaps she did not know that he had driven away Joanna and her mother. Lazarus was alarmed. He went to the house door, and unchained and unlocked it, opened, and stood in the doorway, looking out into the doleful night. The rain came down like a fine spray between him and the lamp. The illuminated windows of the houses were surrounded by fog bows and magnified to stars of the first magnitude. Those persons who went by were buried under umbrellas. A rill ran in the gutter, spinning cabbage leaves, stray fish heads on its surface. He would get very wet if he went along

the Barbican quay to the ham and sausage shop. Besides, he was ashamed to appear there and confess that he was afraid to spend the night alone in the house. Mrs. Thresher knew nothing of his fit. That insulting old Radical, Mr. Thresher, would twit him with the events of Saturday evening.

As he stood in the door, doubtful what to do, something rubbed against his shin and stole past him. He looked down, but could make nothing out in the dark. He re-shut and re-barred the door, and went back to the kitchen.

'I will try again to light a fire,' he said; 'then I shan't feel so miserable and solitary. It is all Joanna's doing.'

He re-laid the fire, and poured some paraffin over the coals. He was successful this time. The flames ascended to the sticks, the sticks crackled, and then with a leap the fire was on the top, the mineral oil was ablaze, and the coals emitted puffs of flame, and began to glow.

Lazarus was so occupied with the fire that he did not observe the presence of a black cat, watching him out of its green eyes, seated on the table. Only when the Jew got up from his knees and took the kettle to fill it did he notice the

creature. He stood still, staring at it in surprise, holding the kettle in one hand. Lazarus had a great dislike to cats. As he looked at the cat the cat looked at him. In the dark the narrow slits of iris had expanded. The eyes shone like moonstones in the candlelight.

'Get out,' said Lazarus; 'I don't want cats here.' The monition was unheeded.

'Do you hear what I say? Get out with you.'

The cat rose and stretched itself, driving its claws into the deal of the table top, and then reseated itself.

'Is that done to insult me?' asked Lazarus. 'What have you come here for? Do you think to hunt mice among my valuable china, and to kitten and rear a family among costly garments? Wait a bit, Yowler! I'll make you yowl!'

He took his light, and went into the shop to get a whip.

He laid hold of the stick that Charles had employed on his own back, and brought it with him into the kitchen. When he returned the cat was gone.

'Where the devil is the creature?' asked Lazarus, looking about him, and switching about with the stick.

He laid the stick on the table, and reseated himself in his chair. But he could now think of nothing but the cat. What had become of the beast? Was it in the larder, getting at the bread and the butter, or the milk, or the mutton chops? He listened, but heard no sound save the drip of the water. Was it in the shop? Or had it got into his own little room, and was prowling among some Capo di Monte, Dresden, and Chelsea figures he had there? He took up the stick again. It was weighted with lead in the handle. If he had the chance he would bring that end down on the head of the cat and kill it. He held the candle in one hand and the stick in the other. He thrust the stick into every corner of the kitchen without dislodging his visitor. He peered into the coal closet, he searched the back kitchen, he examined the larder; the cat was nowhere to be found. Then he went down the passage to the shop. It was hopeless to expect to discover the cat there if it had chosen to conceal itself among the sundry objects piled and scattered through it. He held his breath and listened. Was that the cat purring? On tiptoe he crept near to the place whence the noise came. It was in the window. He craned his ear, then thrust forward

the candle, and had it nearly blown out. A pane had been starred by a stone some time ago, and he had mended it with strips of adhesive paper from a sheet of postage stamps. One strip was loose, and the indriving draught fluttered it and made a sound like the purring of a cat. Then the Jew left the shop and fastened the door behind him, and explored his little sanctum. That door had been left ajar, and it was quite possible that the cat had entered. He sought it in every corner, under the presses, under the bed, behind the sedans. He could see nothing of it. He listened; he could not hear it. Yet the cat must be in the house somewhere, and when he was quiet, and fallen asleep, he would be startled by the gleam of the moony eyes, and a crash; the cat had upset and broken some valuable porcelain. He shut his bedroom door; he shut the passage door, and was again in the kitchen, and there, on the table in the same place as before, as though it had remained there undisturbed, was the black cat, watching him out of its lambent eyes.

'I'll have a watch-dog. If I have to pay fifteen shillings for one I will have one, if only to keep cats away.'

Lazarus was sly. He put the stick behind his back, and turned it in his hand so as to hold the slight end. Then he came towards the table step by step; he would not rouse the suspicions of the creature. He put the candle on the floor.

'Pretty! pretty!' said the Jew in a caressing tone. 'Will I hurt my beauty? Oh no! it is not in the heart of old Lazarus to do you harm. Do you want milk? There is some in the jug in the larder. What do you say to a herring's head? There are some in the sink. May I chuck you under the chin? May I scratch your back, you beauty?'

But the creature did not suffer him to approach without rising, setting up its back, and charging its tail and hair with electricity so that they bristled like the hairs of a flue brush. The expression of its eyes was threatening. It half opened its mouth and showed the long white teeth that armed the gums. Lazarus was afraid the cat would leap at his face, and he put up his arm to protect his eyes, thought better of his attempt, and backed, still watching the cat, into the outer kitchen.

'The black imp!' he muttered. 'I must make a way for it to escape.' Then he unbolted the back door into the yard, and left it ajar.

Having done this he returned to the kitchen. The cat was no longer on the table, no longer visible. Whither it had gone he could not guess. He was afraid to search, lest it should leap out upon him with extended claws, and flaming eyes, and keen teeth to fasten in his flesh.

'I'll have a watch-dog. I must—I will. If it cost me thirty shillings I'll have one to-morrow. As long as Joanna was here none was needed. This is another expense she is putting me to. Oh, I wish the cat would find her, and fly in her face and tear her wicked eyes out.'

He fetched a bottle of brandy from the cupboard, took the kettle from the fire, and mixed himself a strong glass. Then he drew his chair close to the stove and drank his brandy-and-water, listening for the cat, and cursing it, and then Joanna, and thinking he heard a step, and found it was the girl, with a cat's face, and flaming eyes, and a chain of Roman pearls dangling round the neck, and then—somehow the pink silk dress flickered before him, but the brush of the cat hung below it and swept the floor; and then the howdah upstairs began to dance by itself, and the Sabbatical lamp to swing as a flaming pendulum, all its seven jets

alight as he watched it, and wondered whether it would swing so high as to unhook itself from the ceiling and come down with a crash and go out. He poured out more brandy, but was dozing and waking intermittently, and forgot to add the water, and the loaded stick was on the table trying to lift itself on its ferule and dance, but the head was heavy, and at each effort down it came again with a bang.

So he slept, with feverish dreams, sitting in his chair, waiting for the cat to go out at the back door, when he would lock it and retire to his bed, and then for a while forgetting why he sat up. The coals crackled and grew cold. The candle burnt down to the socket and dissolved all the wax, and the flame turned blue and danced over the molten wax.

Then—all at once Lazarus sprang up with a cry, and caught at the stick. Before him stood two figures. He could see their faces indistinctly by the flicker of the expiring candle —one a coarse face marked with scars, and a heavy lower jaw. He felt the stick wrenched from his trembling hand, and after that he saw and felt no more.

On the following morning there was a stir at the Barbican. During the night the Golden

Balls had been entered, robbed, and Lazarus had been found lying dead in his kitchen with his skull broken. A loaded stick lay at his side. On the table, purring and complacent, beside an empty candlestick, sat an ownerless black cat.

CHAPTER LX.

TWO PICTURES.

Every window of Court Royal is lighted up, and the terrace is hung with coloured lamps. Carriage after carriage drives up and deposits members of every knowable family for many miles round Kingsbridge, for the Cheek-Roseveres are settled in, and are giving their first soirée of dancing and music.

The footmen in scarlet and buff are in the hall and on the grand staircase—scarlet and buff are the Cheek-Rosevere livery, because no more showy livery could be thought of. That of the Eveleighs was only buff and scarlet. The house had gone through a reformation under the hands of an art adviser and Oxford Street furniture dealers. Much of the old decoration was preserved but renovated; most of the good Chippendale furniture, and Florentine inlaid cabinets, and Sèvres and Dresden china, and the

pictures of Morland, and Gainsborough, and Gerard Dow were still there. But everything was freshened up, the gilding regilt and burnished, the colours brightened, the polished wood re-polished. The curtains, the coverings, were all of silk or satin, and were new.

The state drawing-room was lighted by electric burners, the chandeliers had been banished from the ball-room. The old motto of the Eveleighs, 'Quod antiquatur et senescit prope interitum est,' was everywhere effaced and supplanted by 'Nil præstat buccæ,' which may be interpreted 'Nothing like Cheek.' In the dining-room over the chimney-piece, the ducal arms had made way for the cognizance of the Cheeks, an unicorn, beneath which was inscribed 'Plentie of Pushe' as well as 'Nil præstat buccæ,' for the old scroll of the legend had been utilised, and two mottoes were needed to fill the scroll from which the lengthy inscription had been erased. Besides, as the family name was double, and the arms were double, why not duplicate the motto?

Some time has elapsed since the event described in the last chapter, and in that time great changes have taken place. The affairs of the Duke reached a climax; Court Royal was lost,

and passed to Cheek of the Monokeratic system. But the Monokeros was too pushing and prosperous a beast to be resigned, and the old man remained at the head of the establishment in town, gathering in money as fast as he could with both hands.

The old man's objections to his son's marriage with Joanna gave way when he found she was entitled to the whole of the Jew's fortune, amounting to seventy thousand pounds. 'A clever girl—a girl of the period,' he said; 'knows how to work her way to the fore. She would have been invaluable to me in my shop.'

Never had the state rooms of Court Royal looked so brilliant and beautiful as this night. Charles Cheek stood in the drawing-room receiving his guests. But we beg his pardon, he is no longer Mr. C. Cheek, but Mr. Cheek-Rosevere—he has assumed his wife's name in addition to his own. Every now and then Charles looked round in expectation and uneasiness for Joanna, who was not present. Prepossessing and handsome, with his fair hair, light moustache, and pleasant blue eyes, he had a cheerful greeting for everyone. 'But where is Joanna?' he thought. The guests looked round also, and wandered through the rooms in quest

of their hostess. 'How very odd! Why is not Mrs. Cheek-Rosevere here to receive us?'

Presently, when all had arrived, a couple of scarlet and buff footmen threw open a door to an inner room and boudoir, and in loud voices announced

'MRS. CHEEK-ROSEVERE!!!'

Whereupon Joanna appeared, charmingly dressed in the richest pearl silk, and wearing abundance of diamonds, *holding a bouquet of hothouse flowers in each hand*; she sailed, smilingly, looking very lovely, down the room, bowing to the right and to the left, giving a hand to none—how could she, holding flowers in each hand?

'My dear Joe!' said Charles to her after everyone was gone, 'how could you behave as you did? It was rude—it was grossly impertinent, and we are such new comers.'

'My dear Charlie,' answered Joanna, with perfect self-satisfaction, 'I know what I am about. Lady Grace could not have done it, and would not; she could afford to be condescending and sweet; her position was unassailable. On the other hand, we are nobodies, who have risen to the surface through trade. We cannot afford to be gracious, or folks will

say we are pleading to be received into society. We must be insolent, and take our place by storm.'

* * * * *

On the road from Teignmouth to Dawlish, a little out of the town, stand two houses in their grounds. The road is somewhat steep, ascending through red banks of sandstone. Presently a little garden door is reached, where there is a fork in the road, and over the wall of red stone can be seen a luxurious growth of arbutus, guelder rose, and acacia, and above the flowering bushes the brown thatch of a cottage, with bedroom windows peeping out through the thatch. By standing on tiptoe one can even look into the garden and see that the cottage has a veranda covered with creeping roses, and that French windows open into this veranda.

A little way higher up the hill is a more pretentious house in what may be called the Italian villa style; but the house is more than a villa, it is almost a mansion. The grounds are fairly extensive, the pines are luxuriant and of choice kinds. The insignis is grown there to a stately tree. There are glass conservatories. At the door stands a footman in buff and scarlet. The windows are of plate glass.

Presently an old gentleman, with hair white as snow, and an almost transparent, wax-like complexion, is wheeled into the garden in a chair, attended by an old bent man, leaning on a stick, and a lady, gentle and smiling.

We recognise our old friends, the Duke of Kingsbridge, Lord Ronald, and Lady Grace. Shortly after the Marquess comes forth, and the party descend the hill.

As they pass the little green door of the cottage, which sits, as it were, at the feet of the other, it is opened, and from it issue Mr. Worthivale and his daughter Lucy.

The united party proceeds to the walk along the sea-wall, extending for a mile above the sands at low water and the sea when the tide is full. There they will be joined after a while by Beavis, who is in a solicitor's office in the town, and likely eventually to be taken into partnership.

Not all the estates of the Duke have been sold. Court Royal—dear Court Royal—is lost for ever. The manor of Kingsbridge is gone. Alvington, Loddiswell, Charlton, are all gone, but Fowelscombe remains—ruinous, indeed, but not lost—and Bigbury.

'You may depend upon it,' says Mr. Worthivale, 'all we want is time. Penzance is

used up. Torquay is done for. The aspect of Paington is against it. The time must come when Bigbury Bay will form a crescent of glittering white houses, tier on tier—when the express from town will fly past Torquay, leap the Dart on a tubular bridge at Dartmouth, and rush past Kingsbridge to find a terminus at Bigbury, *the* climatic resort of the future. Then, your Grace——'

'My dear Worthivale, I shall not live to see the first stone of the new town laid, nor the first sod of the new line turned.'

'But, your Grace, what a comfort to think of the future, the reflorescence of this splendid house! I, also, may not see it, but I live in faith. Your grandchildren——'

'Dear Worthivale,' said the Marquess, 'I am sorry to dash your dream, but I shall never marry.'

'Nor I,' said Lady Grace, in a low tone.

'So the race will die with us. Quod antiquatur et senescit—prope interitum est.'

THE END.

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